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WEAR-DOWN HOLDS

- | | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Airplane spin | 21. Face rake | 41. Leg lock |
| 2. Arm drag | 22. Fireman's carry ram | 42. Leg sweep |
| 3. Arm lock | 23. Flying body press | 43. Manager interference |
| 4. Asian spike | 24. Flying clothesline | 44. Monkey flip |
| 5. Atomic drop | 25. Flying drop kick | 45. Overhead toss |
| 6. Bear hug | 26. Flying elbow drop | 46. Pole ram |
| 7. Bite | 27. Flying head butt | 47. Reverse chin lock |
| 8. Body slam | 28. Flying mare | 48. Rolling scissors |
| 9. Body tackle | 29. Forearm smash | 49. Rope burn |
| 10. Bulldog | 30. Foreign object | 50. Russian sickle |
| 11. Chicken wing | 31. Full nelson | 51. Savate kick |
| 12. Choke slam | 32. Giant swing | 52. Scissors grip |
| 13. Claw | 33. Grapevine | 53. Shoulder breaker |
| 14. Clothesline | 34. Hair pull | 54. Slingshot |
| 15. Cross body block | 35. Hammer lock | 55. Snap mare |
| 16. Double axehandle | 36. Head lock | 56. Step-over toe hold |
| 17. Drop kick | 37. Head stomp | 57. Suplex |
| 18. Eagle split | 38. Hip roll | 58. Surfboard |
| 19. Elbow smash | 39. Irish whip | 59. Turnbuckle smash |
| 20. Eye gouge | 40. Knee drop | 60. Wrist lock |

SET-UP HOLDS

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| 61. Abdominal stretch | 71. Cradle | 81. Power bomb |
| 62. Avalanche | 72. Crucifix | 82. Power slam |
| 63. Backbreaker | 73. DDT | 83. Scorpion deathlock |
| 64. Backroll press | 74. Figure four | 84. Sleeper |
| 65. Belly to belly | 75. Flying leg drop | 85. Slingshot suplex |
| 66. Big splash | 76. Gourd buster | 86. Spine buster |
| 67. Boston crab | 77. Hurricanrana | 87. Stunner |
| 68. Brain buster | 78. Moonsault | 88. Sunset flip |
| 69. Camel clutch | 79. Neckbreaker | 89. Superplex |
| 70. Cobra clutch | 80. Piledriver | 90. Texas cloverleaf |

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WRESTLER'S NAME (DO NOT USE ANY REAL PRO WRESTLER NAMES)

WEAR-DOWN HOLDS: Choose 10 of the holds at the left numbered 1-60. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____

SET-UP HOLDS: Choose 5 of the holds at the left numbered 61-90. Only use a hold once.

1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____

FINISHING HOLD: Create your own custom final maneuver or choose a hold from our list.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

I enjoyed editing this magazine. I mean, I *really* enjoyed editing this magazine. At the time this issue was being put together, I badly needed to read anything about wrestling that did not contain the name Chris Benoit.

I do not plan to use this space to give my opinion about the wrestler who authorities are convinced took the lives of his wife and young son before committing suicide. Most of our editors will have the opportunity to do that in a special section of *Inside Wrestling/The Wrestler* that goes on sale September 11 (of all days).

As I write, we're stuck in a nebulous time period after the double-murder-suicide in which the science of the case has not been fully analyzed and the media has seen fit to substitute "expert" speculation for real news.

This was a classic made-for-cable-news story, the type that the Nancy Graces of the world run with every single night until their overnight Nielsen numbers tell them it's no longer "newsworthy." I got call after call from Fox and MSNBC and the like seeking my opinion on what took place in Fayetteville, Georgia. I declined. I knew Chris and Nancy, but certainly not enough to offer any real insight on what happened that weekend or during their private moments in the days, weeks, and years leading to that weekend. I am not going to go on TV and trash this business by answering pointed questions about Benoit's so-called steroid-induced terror rage. I am also not going to be an apologist for wrestling, WWE, or Chris Benoit. I'm certainly not going to say that this could or couldn't have been prevented, or who, beyond Benoit, should share the burden of responsibility. I simply do not know.

At the time this initial media frenzy was occurring, nobody did. Maybe the toxicology report will shed a little light on why a talented wrestler, his beautiful wife, and their young child are all dead, but couldn't that wait until we have a few solid facts? With few exceptions (notably Dave Meltzer and Alex Marvez), it seemed everybody associated with this business who was interviewed had one of two goals: to bury WWE or to register for Vince McMahon's "Kiss My Ass" club. I know a lot of these people—and I was embarrassed for them.

Sometimes I get embarrassed for this sport as well. You can have the greatest Wellness Program ever devised, but, if the power brokers have created a culture that encourages the use of steroids or painkillers (be they prescribed or not), drug abuse cannot be undone by random testing, and even more random punishments. If the so-called drug policy is in place merely to cover asses, WWE is very much exposed right now.

It's good that WWE has decided to move on from this tragedy. Let them accomplish McMahon's mission statement of "putting smiles on people's faces." But they need to be very much aware that this isn't one of those instances where they can hope that time distances these events from our collective consciousness. To think otherwise would make a horrific tragedy that much worse.

But, in spite of the events of June 22–24 and some of the ridiculous news coverage that followed, we as wrestling fans should not feel that life will never get back to normal. We are allowed to enjoy this sport without experiencing pangs of guilt. We're entitled to our smiles. We're entitled to our "Report Cards" special, in which we're reminded of what's still most important: men and women working hard to make the grade.

Enjoy reading the issue. I enjoyed editing it.

Stu Saks

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Stuart M. Saks
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Harry Burkett
MANAGING EDITOR
Lisa Rocchi
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Jim Malloy
ART DIRECTORS

David Romanosky Sherry Stravino
Kevin Boone Meg Hine

PRODUCTION MANAGER
Bethany Lawler

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Cliff Campo

IMAGING DIRECTOR
Dave Dickey

CONTRIBUTING EDITOR
David Lenker

SENIOR WRITERS

Dan Murphy Frank Krewda
Brandi Mankiewicz Frank Ingiosi

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Matt Brock Elizabeth A. Hunter
Mike Spillane James Guttman
Bill Meltzer C.F. Hunter
Tim Drake Brady Hicks
Al Alven Jake Black
Steve Silver Philip Variale
Kevin McElvaney Al Castle

CONTRIBUTING ARTIST

Jason Conlan

CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHERS

George Napolitano Duane Long
Joe Zanolle George Tahinos
Steve Beyer Timothy A. Walker
Mike Lano James McAtee
Koichi Yoshizawa Wayne McCarty
Mary-Kate Grosso Dorothy Lee
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(215) 643-6385
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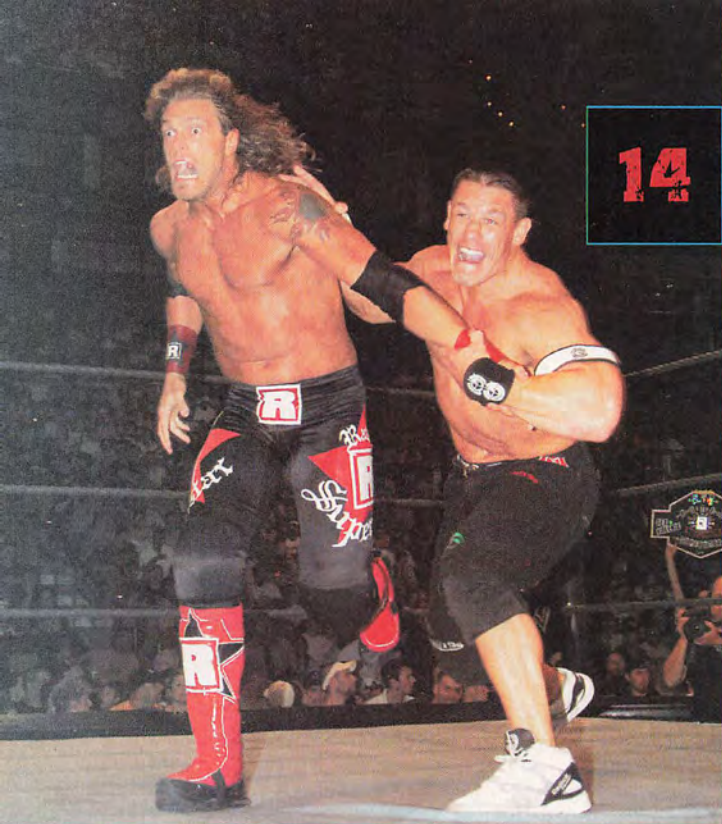
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SUBSCRIPTION INQUIRIES

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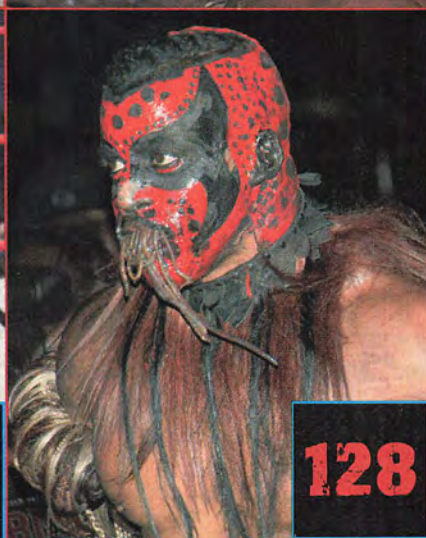
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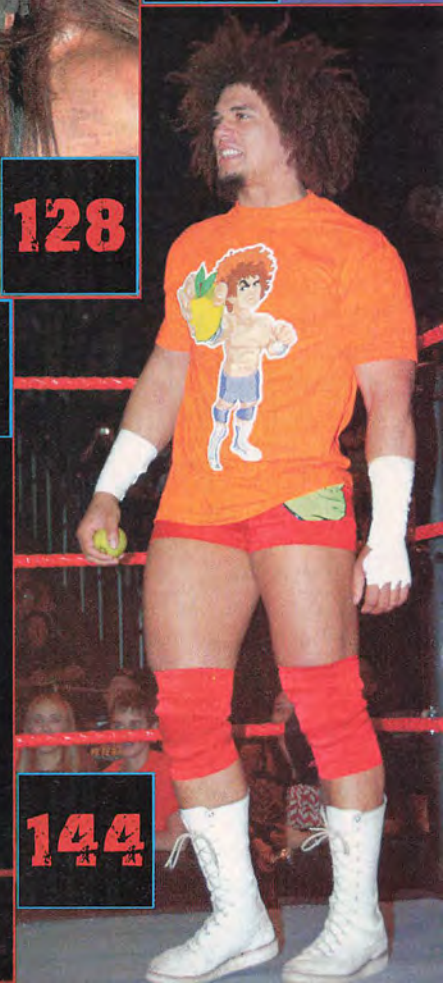


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REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS

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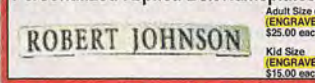
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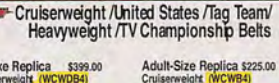
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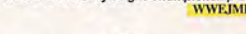
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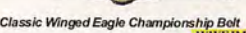
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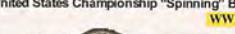
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OUR 2007 REPORT CARDS OF THE STARS

WHEN WE BEGAN compiling annual Report Cards for some of the biggest stars in wrestling a few years ago, all we wanted to do was give an objective benchmark of a wrestler's development, assess his or her potential, and identify where he or she may be in need of improvement. What began as a simple analytical exercise has grown into one of the most widely read, eagerly anticipated, and highly debated issues of the year, trailing only the "PWI 500" and the year-end Achievement Awards as the issues that flood the office with the most e-mails, letters, and occasional angry phone calls from the wrestlers themselves. Heck, the Spirit Squad alone was responsible for more than 100 furious calls to our office over their final grades.

No grading system is entirely accurate—not the S.A.T. (the exam, not the Maximo brothers), not the Bar exam. In fact, in college courses, two professors can grade the same paper and give wildly different marks. But, inconsistencies aside, there is a tremendous value in evaluating achievement and progress against standard benchmarks, be it in schools, in the workplace, and even in the wrestling ring.

Once again, we have evaluated 50 competitors on five standard criteria: Goal Achievement, Marketability, Repertoire, Career Growth, and Overall Value. These are standard criteria, but we use a sliding scale to grade achievement in each area. For example, one year ago at this time, Elijah Burke's biggest goal was to graduate from OVW and find a roster spot on a WWE brand. His goals were more modest than someone like Christopher Daniels, who never got any closer to his personal goal of winning the TNA World title this year. Therefore, Burke gets a higher grade for Goal Achievement than Daniels, even though Daniels is arguably a bigger star and has wrestled more high-profile bouts over the past 12 months than Burke.

Marketability may be our most controversial assessment area because we are looking at both the wrestler's natural charisma or "likeability," as well as his promotion's ability to adequately market him. Of all five areas, this may be the one where the individual wrestler has the least amount of control over his

final grade. However, marketability is a crucial component for a wrestler's success. A wrestler can have all the skills in the world, but if he can't make the fans excited about seeing him in action, he's not going to make it far in this business, but a wrestler who brims with charisma even a heel like Mr. Kennedy can build such a passionate following among fans that it can force promoters to feature him in more high-profile bouts.

We assess Repertoire by looking at the depth of a wrestler's move set, as well as his or her "ring intelligence." When the wrestler has an advantage, does he or she efficiently capitalize on that advantage, or does he or she have a habit of making foolish decisions that squander the advantage? How does a given wrestler react when forced to counter-wrestle or adapt to an unfamiliar game plan? To answer these questions, we studied hours of videotape, looking for small nuances and "tells" to find little mistakes even the wrestlers may not have realized they were making. Without a doubt, this area of analysis has gotten us more angry calls from wrestlers than any other area.

Career Growth simply reflects how a competitor has matured over the past year—whether they are moving backward or forward. Overall Value is the cumulative average of all the grades given to each wrestler, which determines how important a wrestler is to his or her home promotion or brand. A warning to the 50 competitors evaluated: Check your egos at the door. We're brutally honest in our assessment, and some of you may not like the grades you receive.

Enjoy the pages that follow and let us know if our grades were on the mark, or if you think we need to have our academic tenure reviewed.

Special thanks to Dan Murphy, who summarized the findings of the editors commissioned to make these analyses, and to our photography department (George Napolitano in particular), as well as Frank Vitucci at WWE and Lee South at TNA.

KURT ANGLE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We wonder if Kurt Angle realized just how hard it would be to win championship gold in TNA. At Slammiversary, Angle finally captured the TNA World title without having to worry about Jim Cornette taking it away because of some controversy beyond his control. Perhaps just as impressive as winning the title, Angle also beat Samoa Joe in a best-of-three PPV series, firmly establishing himself as the top star in the promotion. But, when WWE released Angle in 2006, they portrayed him as damaged goods—a wrestler who was so obsessed with winning that he was

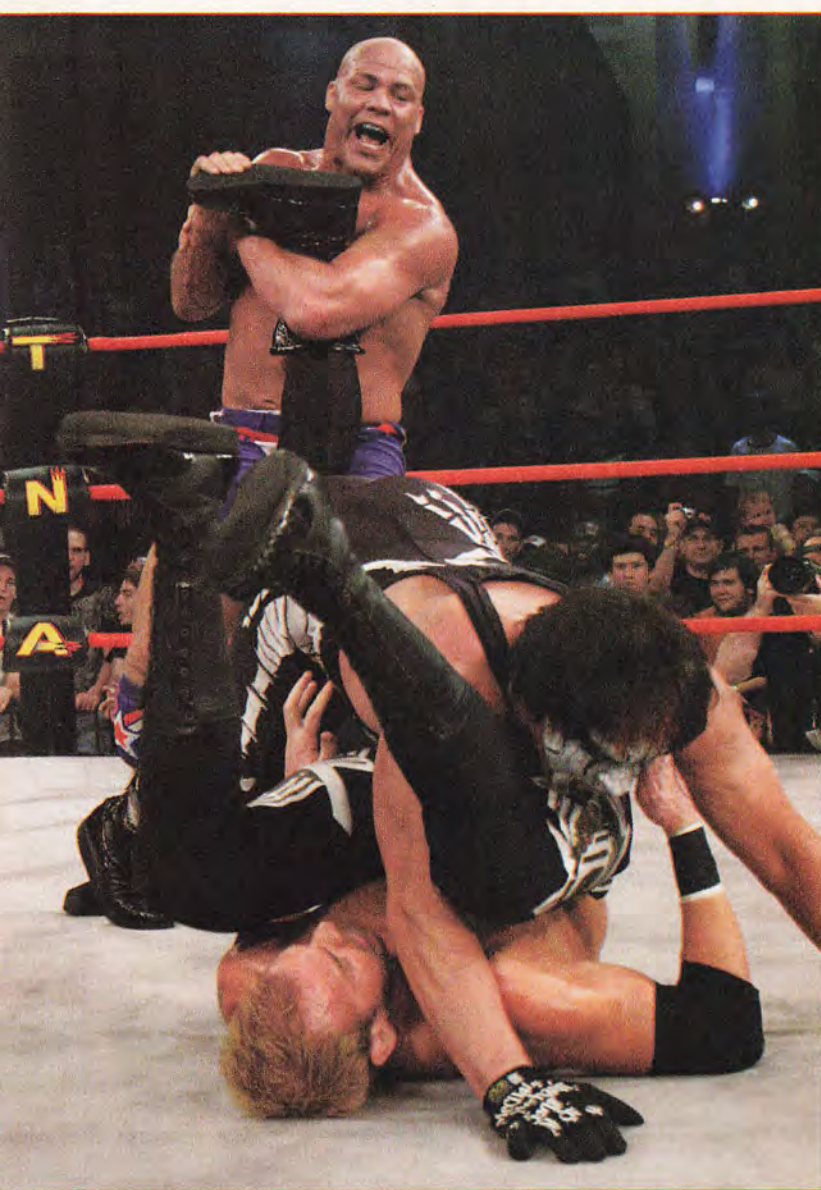
pushing his body beyond the limits at the expense of his own well-being. Angle continues to talk about stretching himself even further by considering MMA competition. Although Angle has achieved his goals of the past year, his new goals may be too lofty. **GRADE: A-**

MARKETABILITY: Angle is the most marketable star that TNA has ever had on its roster. As a former world champion in WWE and former Olympic gold medalist, Angle has a reputation as a marquee star, which will translate into merchandise sales for TNA. If TNA Creative can build upon Angle's reputation, and the latest indication is that TNA is going with the "Wrestling Machine" gimmick that Angle utilized in ECW, then Angle—as TNA World champion—will be the company's premier headliner for several months to come. Only injuries can hold Angle back at this point. **GRADE: A**

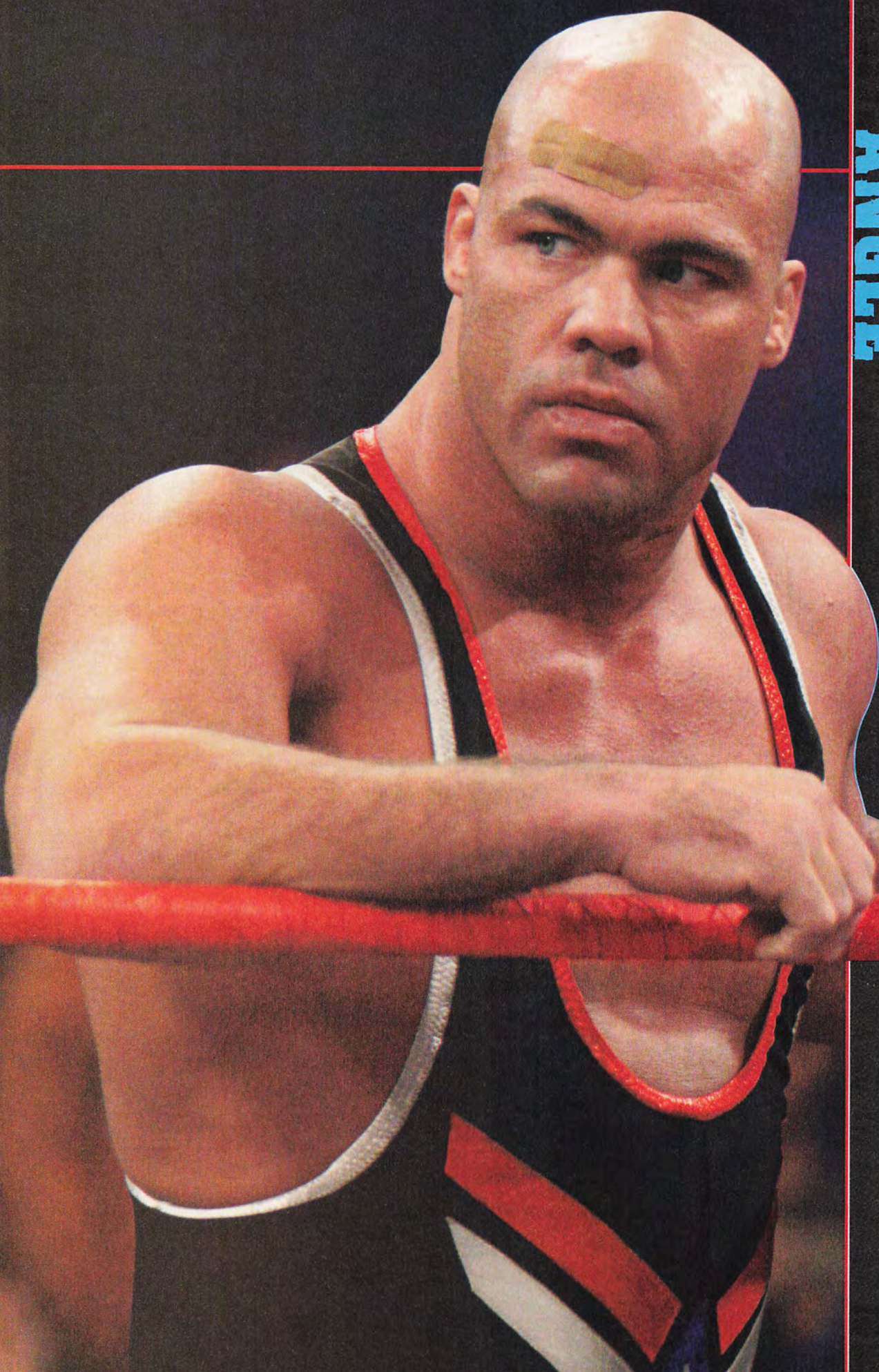
REPERTOIRE: There is no finer counter-wrestler in the sport than Angle. Even though he no longer uses the high-risk moonsaults he occasionally used four years ago, he has replaced those potentially dangerous moves with even more submission locks and holds. His repertoire grows with each passing year. **GRADE: A+**

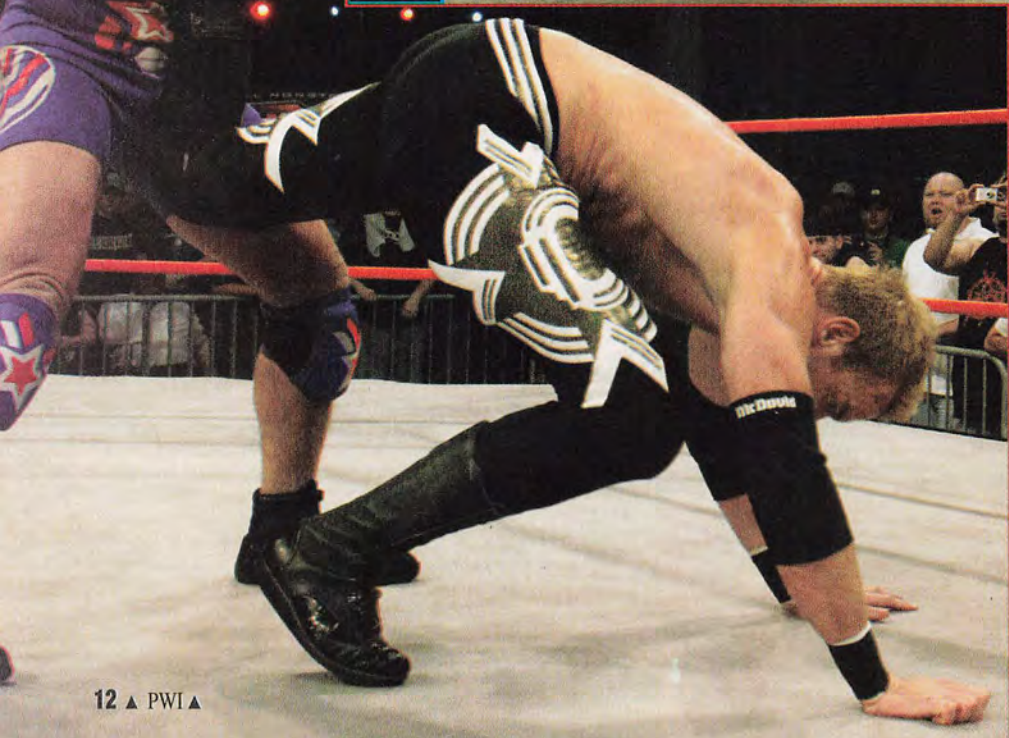
CAREER GROWTH: What's a better position—being an ECW title contender or TNA World champion? Obviously, we would say the latter, but based purely on weekly TV ratings alone, a case could be made that ECW is much more visible and the preferable option. But, if he can help take TNA to the next level, he may be able to shape his own destiny. With TNA giving him a renewed push as World champion, this could actually happen. **GRADE: A-**

OVERALL VALUE: Angle is still capable of wrestling Match of the Year caliber bouts, and his presence (along with Sting, Scott Steiner, and Samoa Joe) gives credibility to TNA and increases the prestige of the TNA World title. As a man who has achieved everything in wrestling there is to achieve, he is a tremendous asset to TNA. And, as his performance this year shows, he's still a championship-level competitor. **GRADE: A**



KURT
ANGLE





KURT ANGLE



6

1 Kurt Angle's first appearance on TNA caused quite a commotion. He immediately targeted Samoa Joe, jeopardizing Joe's hopes of gaining the World championship. Amid all the controversy surrounding his jump from WWE, Angle did not intend to make a quiet debut.

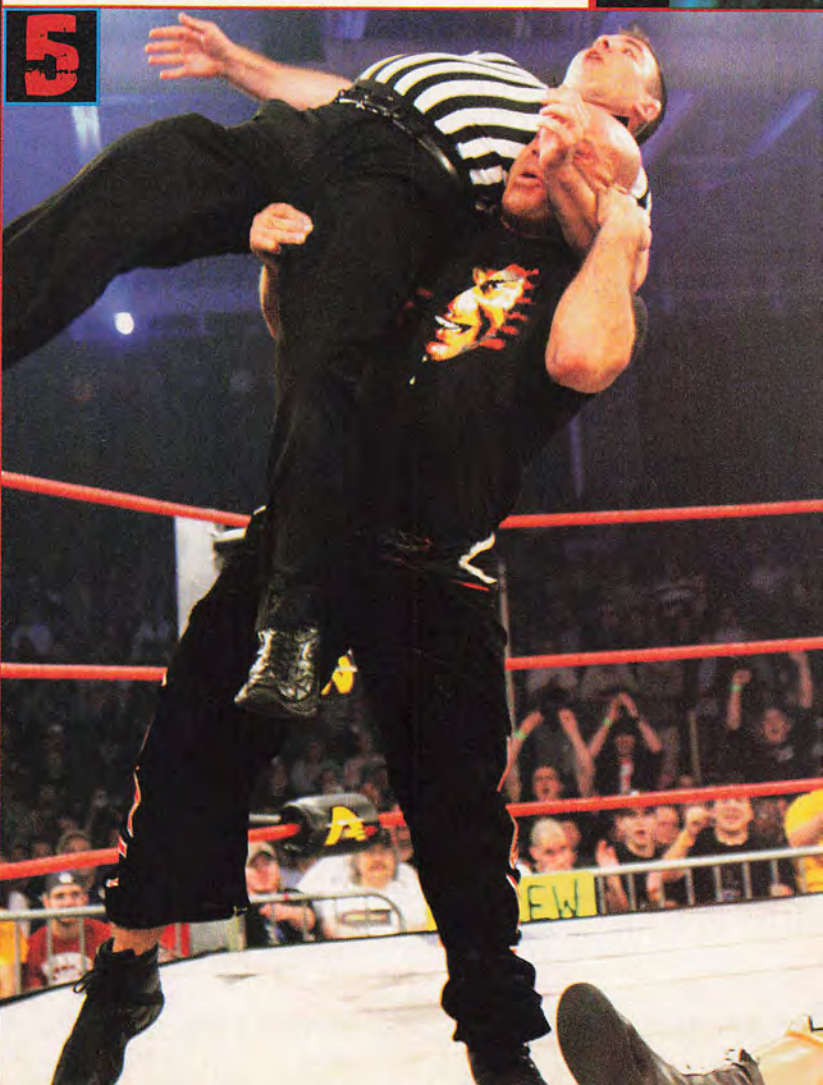
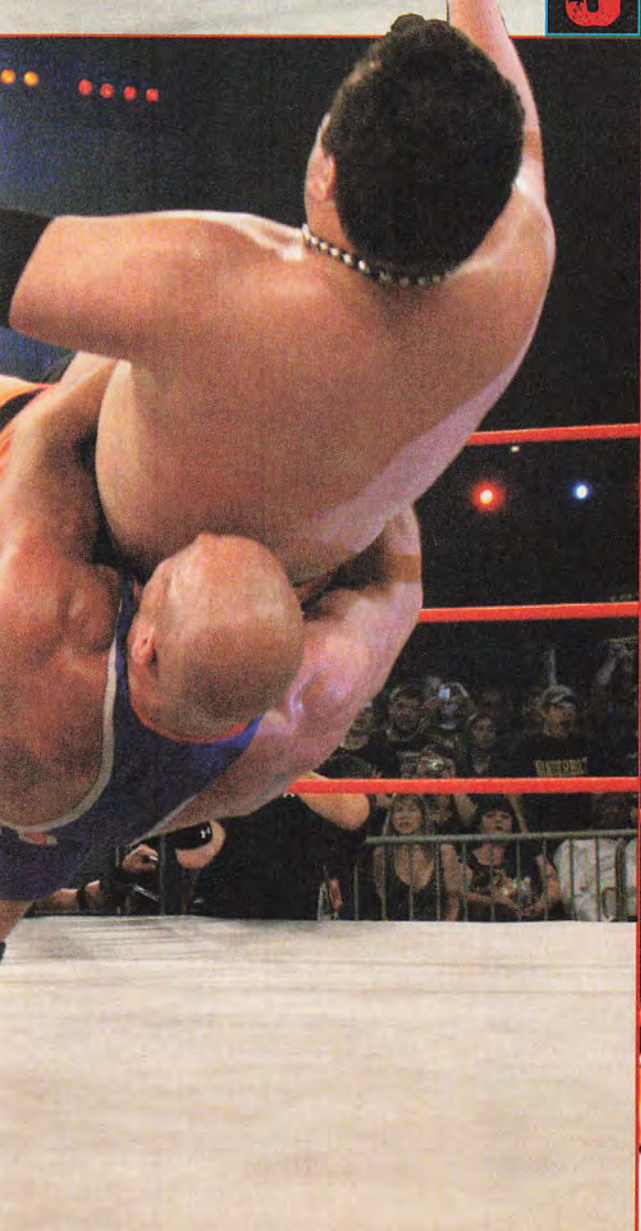
2 After Christian Cage and Sting questioned Angle's controversial championship win at Sacrifice, Jim Cornette stripped Angle of the belt. But Angle claimed the TNA World title one month later at Slammiversary in the "King Of The Mountain" match, making Cage eat his words.

3 An intense series of matches between Angle and Samoa Joe began at Genesis 2006 with Joe tapping out in the first match to Angle's famed anklelock, ending Joe's undefeated streak in one-on-one matches.

4 Kurt Angle's repertoire has not suffered since leaving WWE. He still destroys his competition via submission holds, suplexes, and classic scientific moves, outperforming bigger and seemingly more powerful men, such as Samoa Joe.

5 Kurt Angle had every intention of dominating TNA when he signed the most surprising contract in TNA history. He eliminated everyone in his way—even the referee—before finally claiming the TNA World title at Slammiversary.

6 On November 16, 2006, Angle made his TNA debut on *Impact*. He placed Abyss in the anklelock, defeating the "Man-Monster." After the match, Samoa Joe attacked the Olympian.



5

JOHN CENA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The reigning Raw World champion may be the most divisive figure ever to wear a WWE championship, but even his vocal critics can't deny the success "The Champ" has had this year. Cena finally proved his superiority over Edge and then slew a pair of monsters in Umaga and The Great Khali. Between derailing the "Samoan Bulldozer" and improbably flooring Khali with the FU, Cena managed to convincingly defeat Hall of Famer Shawn Michaels in the main event of WrestleMania 23. He might have lost a few prominent non-title matches (notably his pinfall losses to Michaels on Raw and Khali on *Saturday Night's Main Event*), but Cena has been a dominant World champion and managed to come through time and time again when his title is at stake. **GRADE: A+**

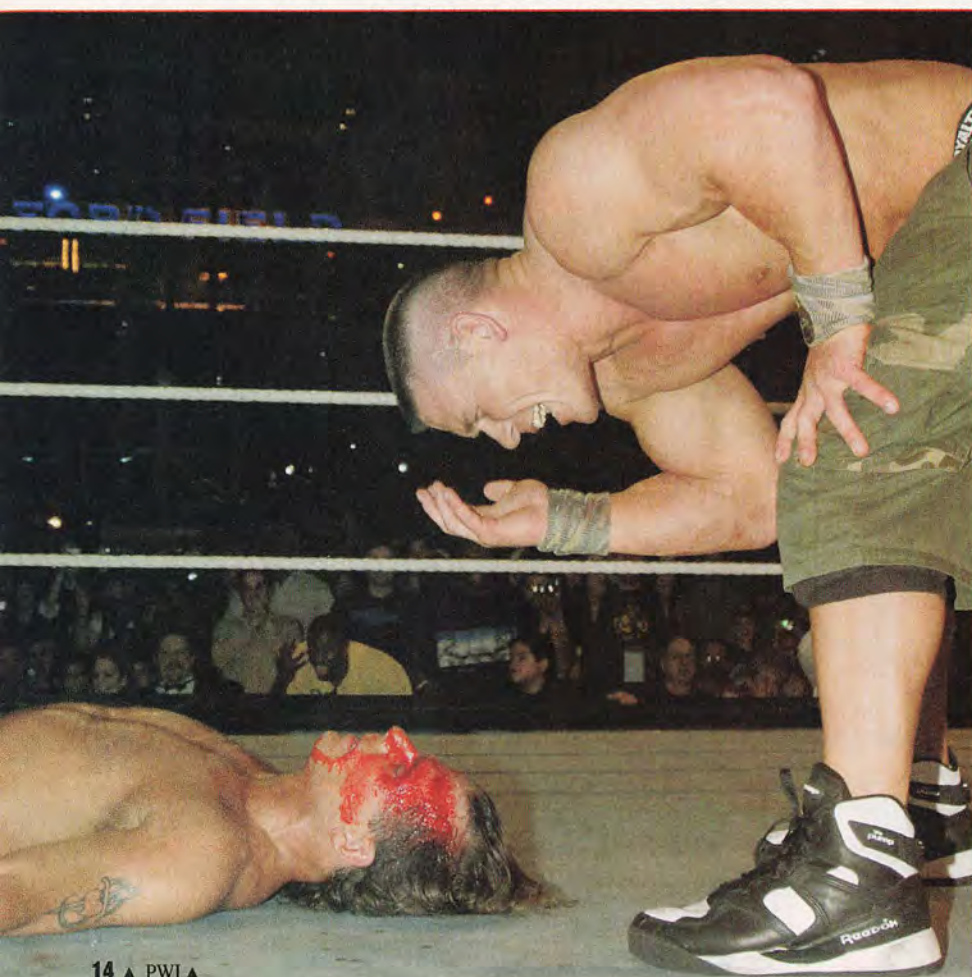
MARKETABILITY: Again, there will be a percentage of WWE fans who will never warm to Cena. Cena knows that, and so does the WWE marketing department. But those critics only constitute about 25 percent of WWE's

fan base. Cena is beloved by a growing number of fans, and he's always winning over new fans through his tireless work ethic and positive attitude. Cena's big-screen debut, *The Marine*, showed that Cena has enough charisma and screen presence to remain WWE's ambassador to mainstream audiences. Like it or not, Cena is unquestionably the most marketable man in wrestling today. **GRADE: A+**

REPERTOIRE: Even A+ students have some weaknesses. Cena has improved tremendously since his days as The Prototype in OVW, but he is limited by a relatively weak offensive repertoire. Cena relies almost exclusively on five or six pet holds, usually wearing down opponents with shoulderblocks, clotheslines, and bulldogs before an FU slam or STFU crossface. Considering Cena is the reigning Raw World champion, there's no question his repertoire is effective, but he's going to have to update his move set if he wants to stay on top. As he is, a challenger who takes the time to properly scout him and study tapes of his matches has a good chance of avoiding his primary moves. **GRADE: B**

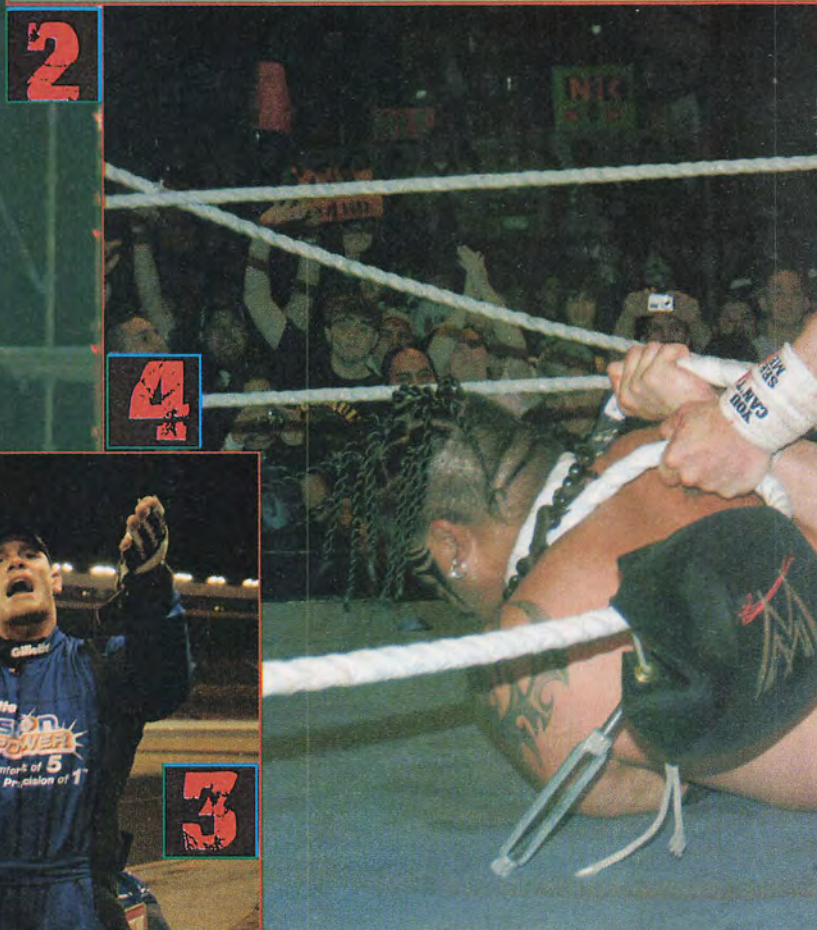
CAREER GROWTH: After vanquishing both Umaga and Khali, Cena seems to have a better grasp on the title than ever before. There are still a few threats looming on the horizon in Randy Orton and Bobby Lashley, but Cena has matured as champion. He has to be considered the favorite in any match in which he competes. **GRADE: A+**

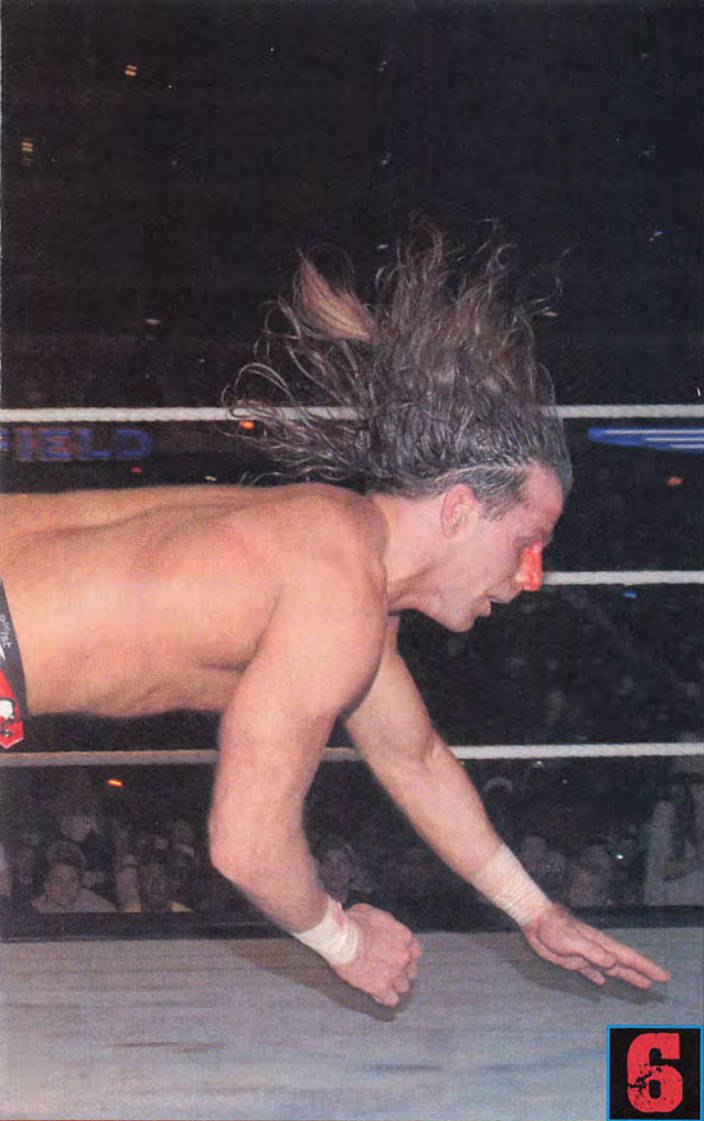
OVERALL VALUE: Regardless of whether fans love Cena or love to hate him, he makes the title picture interesting. Cena draws ratings and brings fans to the arena, and he sells more merchandise than anyone else in wrestling. He is also one of wrestling's most honorable titleholders in years and has helped increase the prestige of the Raw title by being a fighting champion. Forget what a certain U.S. champion says ... Cena is wrestling's true MVP. **GRADE: A**



JOHN CENA







1 The Raw champ carries Kevin Federline like a small child on the playground during their match back in January. The skinny, wannabe rap artist actually scored a pinfall over WWE's top star ... thanks to Umaga.

2 Just like in his movie, *The Marine*, John Cena is a hero who gets the job done regardless of the situation. During his falls-count-anywhere match against The Great Khali at One Night Stand, Cena finishes off the 7'3", 420-pounder with an FU off a crane.

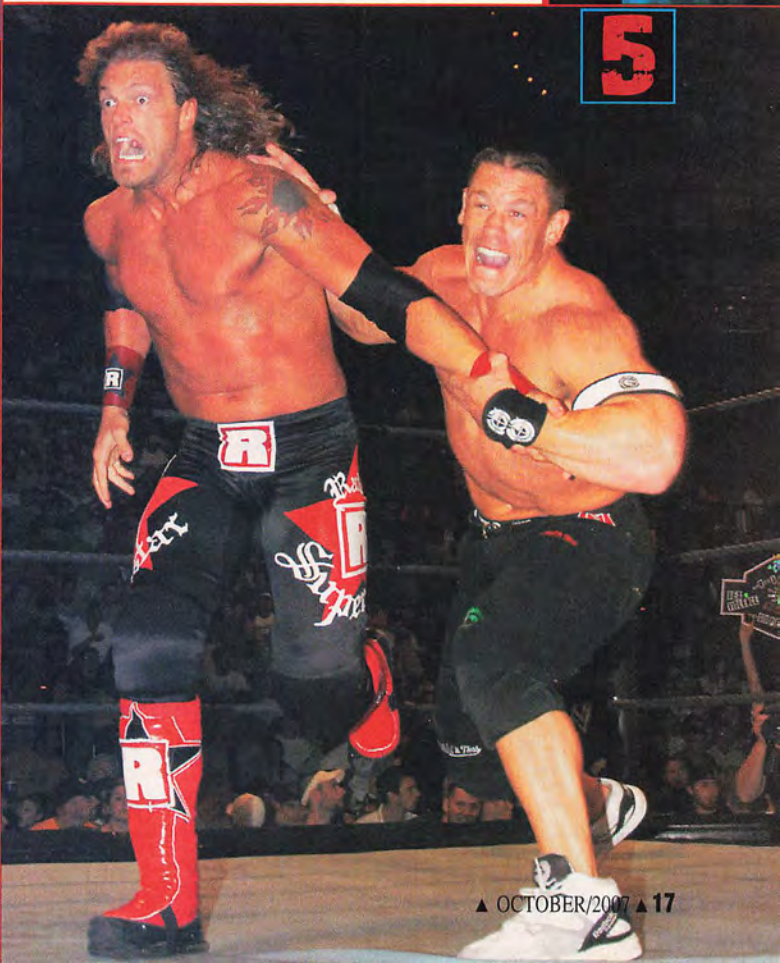
3 No one can deny Cena's value to WWE, considering that he's been involved in high-profile gigs such as *The Marine*, Subway commercials, and the *Fast Cars & Superstars* reality series on ABC. Here, stock car driver Carl Edwards seems entertained by the man.

Photo by Guy D'Alema

4 Cena literally had Umaga tied up in knots at the Royal Rumble, where he handed the "Samoan Bulldozer" his first defeat. A secret to the Raw World champion's success is that he often has innovative solutions to seemingly insurmountable problems.

5 Cena's feud with Edge may go down as a legendary rivalry in wrestling history. Although Cena is Raw World champion and Edge is Smackdown World champion, it's hard to believe these two won't clash again in the near future.

6 Bret Hart once likened himself to the coyote and Shawn Michaels to the roadrunner—a contrast that Cena completely understands. Cena's main task against HBK was to keep the wily veteran from scampering away.



BRYAN DANIELSON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The past year has been a transitional period in Bryan Danielson's career. After dropping the Ring of Honor title to Homicide at "Final Battle 2006," Danielson embarked on a tour of Japan's Pro Wrestling NOAH. Upon his return from Japan, he announced two immediate goals: winning the vacant NWA heavyweight title and regaining the ROH championship. He has a new momentum and appears to be wrestling as well as ever, but he has gone from being a champion to a challenger during the past year. **GRADE: A-**

MARKETABILITY: We've criticized Danielson for being "blandier than Backlund" in the past, but we might have underestimated his appeal. Danielson is the most respected American competitor on the independent scene today. His name represents wrestling excellence, the same way the names Flair, Hart, Malenko, and Angle did in the past. Having resisted the lure of leaving ROH for TNA or WWE, Danielson is the unannounced

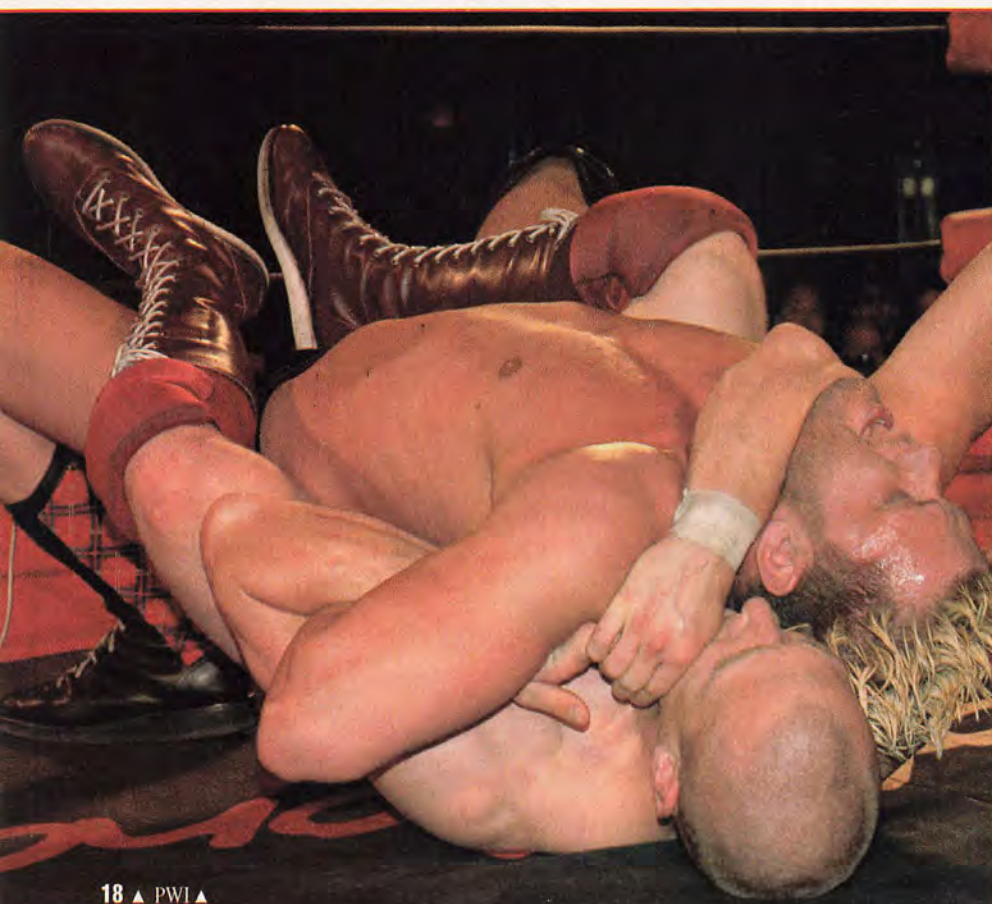
champion of the rabid fans who prize pure wrestling over storylines and sports entertainment. Danielson has come to represent the roots of wrestling, and he is regarded as a demigod by purists. By becoming the best wrestler he can be, Danielson has found his niche. **GRADE: A-**

REPERTOIRE: Danielson's repertoire is so extensive he made a game out of finding new ways to beat opponents, constantly debuting a new variety of submission moves and impressive finishers. When it comes to technical wrestling excellence, Danielson is the standard by which all others are measured. **GRADE: A+**

CAREER GROWTH: Despite having done very little of note in the U.S. over the past six months, Danielson is poised to become a bigger star than ever. With Ring of Honor entering the video-on-demand universe, Danielson will be exposed to an entirely new audience. At the taping for the debut VOD show, Danielson teamed with ROH champ

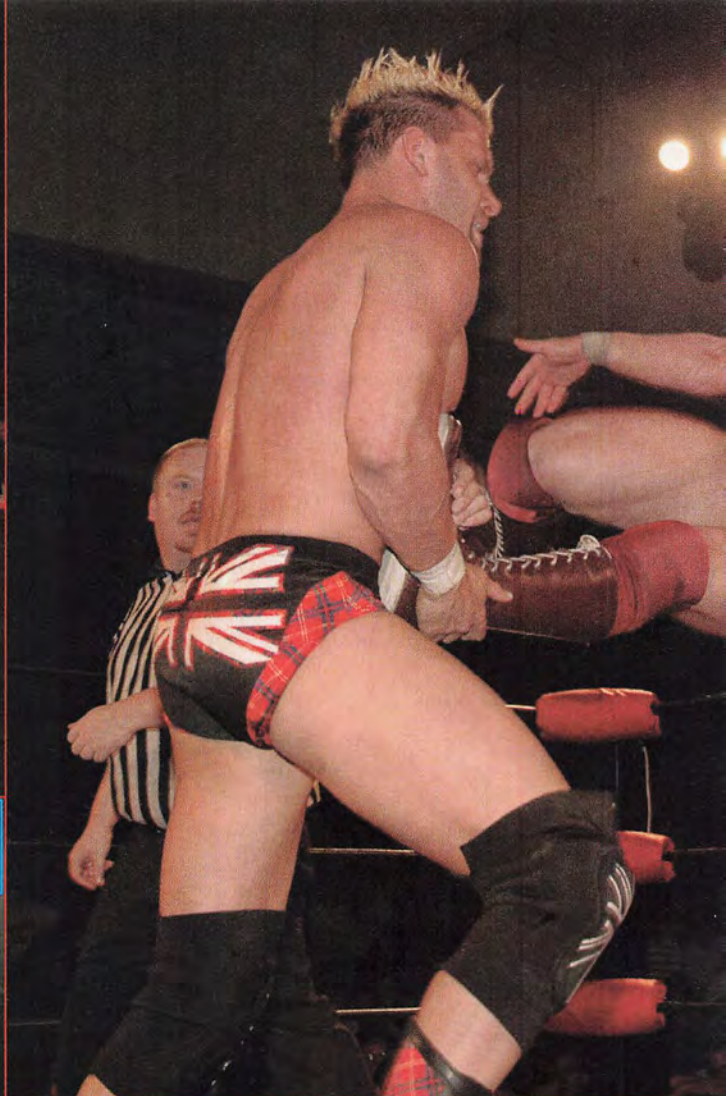
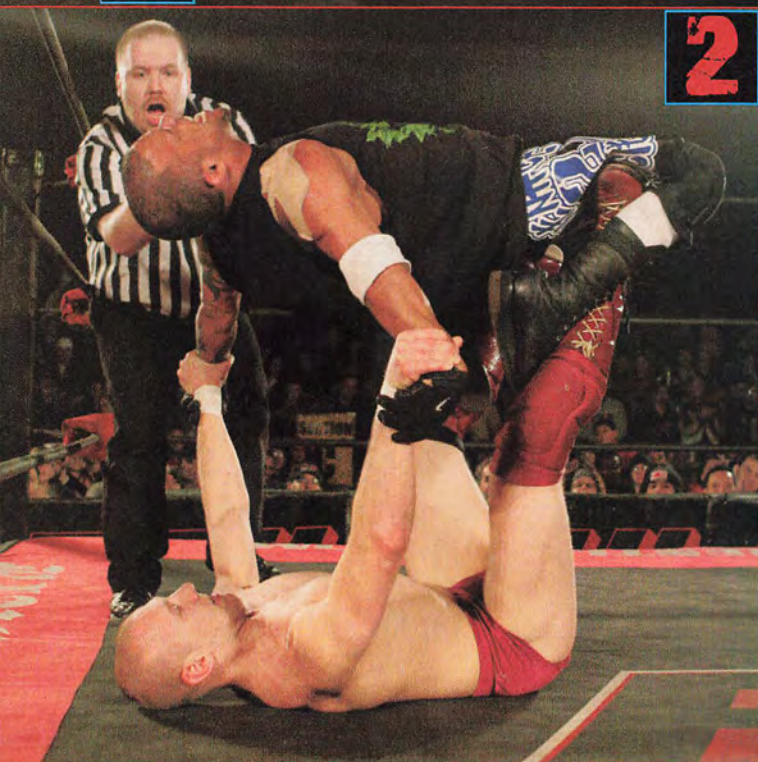
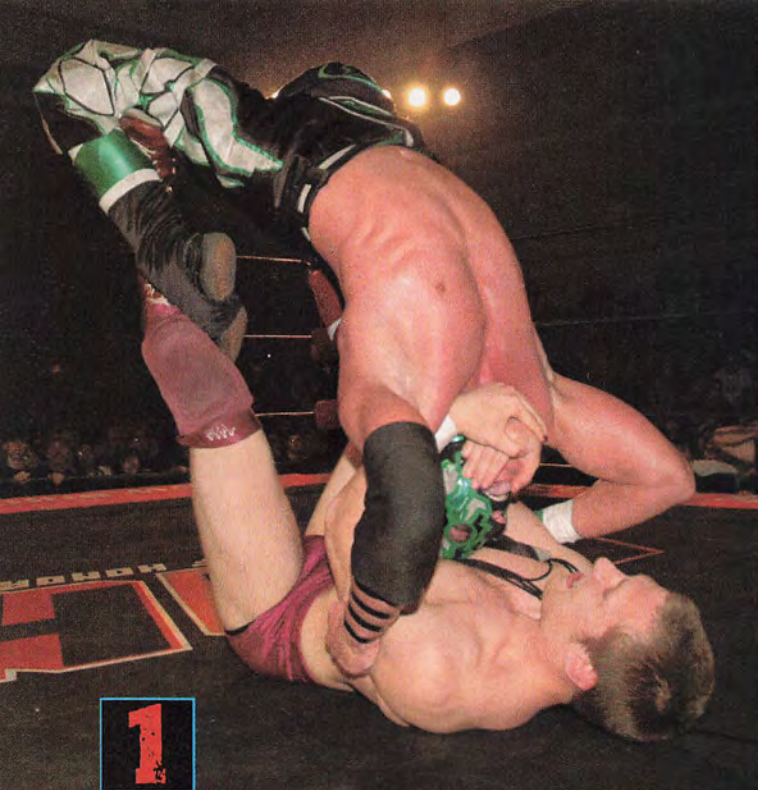
Takeshi Morishima to beat KENTA and Nigel McGuinness. He is considered the favorite to take the ROH belt away from Morishima, and his title chase will be available to a national TV audience. Soon, mainstream fans will learn what the ROH faithful has been saying for years: Danielson is one of the best in the world. **GRADE: A+**

OVERALL VALUE: Morishima may hold the title belt, but Danielson is ROH's franchise player. He has remained true to ROH, and the company has to appreciate his loyalty just as much as his wrestling ability. He is the perfect man to carry the ROH banner at this critical stage in the company's development. No one better symbolizes the ideals and values of ROH than Danielson. **GRADE: A**



BRYAN
DANIELSON







6

1 The secret of Bryan Danielson's excellence has long been exclusive to ROH fans and competitors such as Delirious. But with the ROH video-on-demand deal, more people will realize what all the hype has been about.

2 Ring of Honor's mainstream transition relies on key players to exhibit the ideals of the company. No one embodies ROH more than Danielson.

3 The ROH title was synonymous with the name Bryan Danielson until he graciously handed the belt over in defeat to Homicide in December 2006. Since Danielson's return, he has been named the favorite to defeat the massive Morishima for the title.

4 If one wants to experience technical wrestling at its finest, look no further than the master of the independent circuit. Danielson knows how to tangle with an opponent and cause the most pain.

5 Even without the title in hand, Danielson is still Ring of Honor's top player. His absence from ROH was tough on the fans, but he has returned healthy and with a renewed vigor. Opponents such as Nigel McGuinness perhaps wish he had stayed in Japan just a little longer.

6 After losing the ROH heavyweight title to Homicide, Danielson took some time to heal nagging injuries before embarking on a tour of Japan. It became quickly apparent that the "American Dragon" has not lost any momentum.

BRYAN
DANIELSON



5



EDGE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: If there's one thing Edge knows how to do, it's achieve his goals. After struggling in his quest to regain the Raw World title from John Cena, he changed his course and formed an alliance with Randy Orton. On top of winning the Raw World tag team belts and forming one of the most impressive new tandems in years, Edge rode Team RKO back to main-event contention, feuding with DX. When he failed to win the Royal Rumble or the "Money In The Bank" ladder match to ensure another title shot, he managed to connive his way into a match with the injured Ken Kennedy with the MITB title shot at stake. Then, the ever-opportunistic Torontonian cashed in his MITB after Batista and Mark Henry had battered Smackdown World champion The Undertaker. There are plenty of things *not* to admire about Edge, but you have to be impressed by the way he works the system to get what he wants. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Even as Smackdown's top baddie, Edge still sells plenty of merchandise. A few

years ago, we wondered if Edge would ever be able to make that next step to the main-event level. His relationship with Lita gave him that extra—forgive the pun—*edge* he needed. He has finally earned credibility as a capable and dangerous wrestler. As his designation as the highest-rated Raw World champion in five years (based on Raw quarter-hour measurements) illustrates, people want to watch Edge compete, even if they hate him. He doesn't have the mainstream appeal of John Cena or Batista, but he's close. **GRADE: A-**

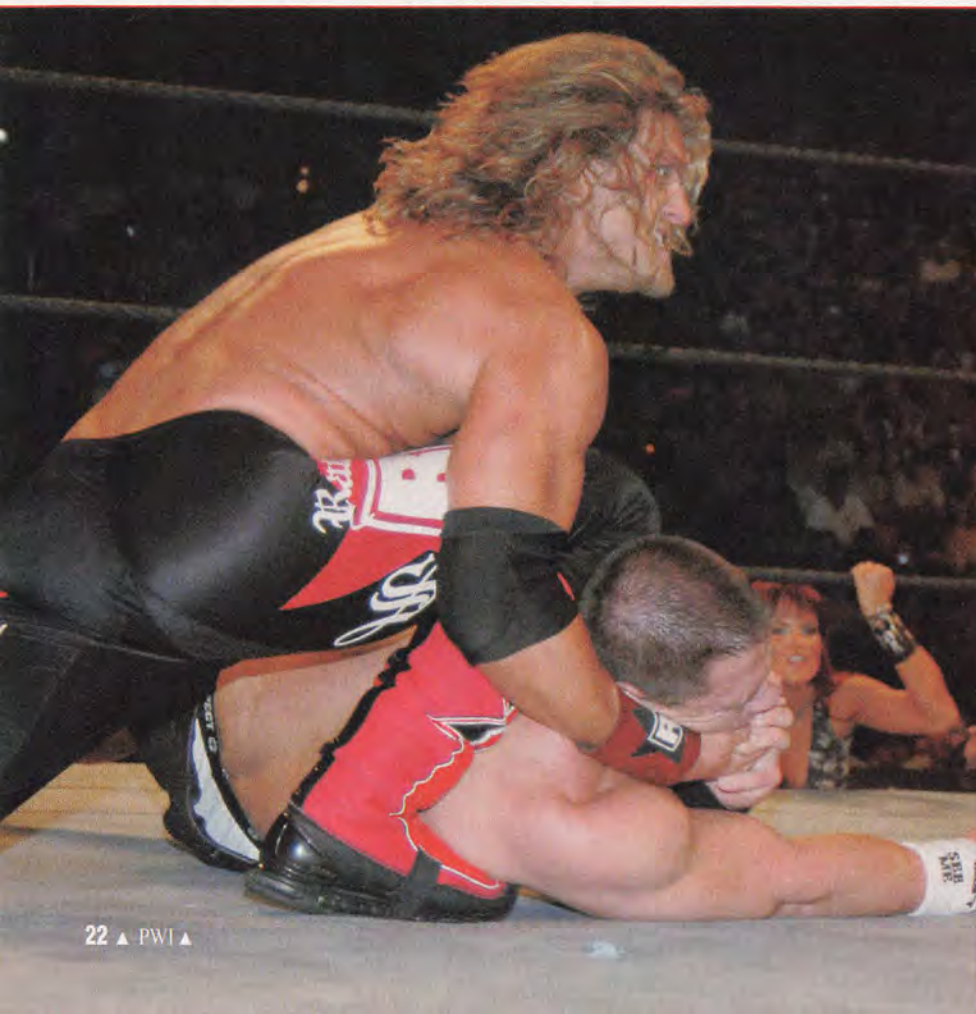
REPERTOIRE: We think Edge has spent some time studying tapes of Eddie Gilbert. Edge has mastered the art of concealing rulebreaking tendencies from referees and infuriating opponents to gain the upper hand. He places his body between himself and the referee to conceal a choke. He creates a diversion that allows him to blast an opponent in the head with the title belt. Add that ring awareness to a couple of highly effective finishers (the spear and the DDT),

and you have a very effective repertoire. It's more important to be effective than flashy.

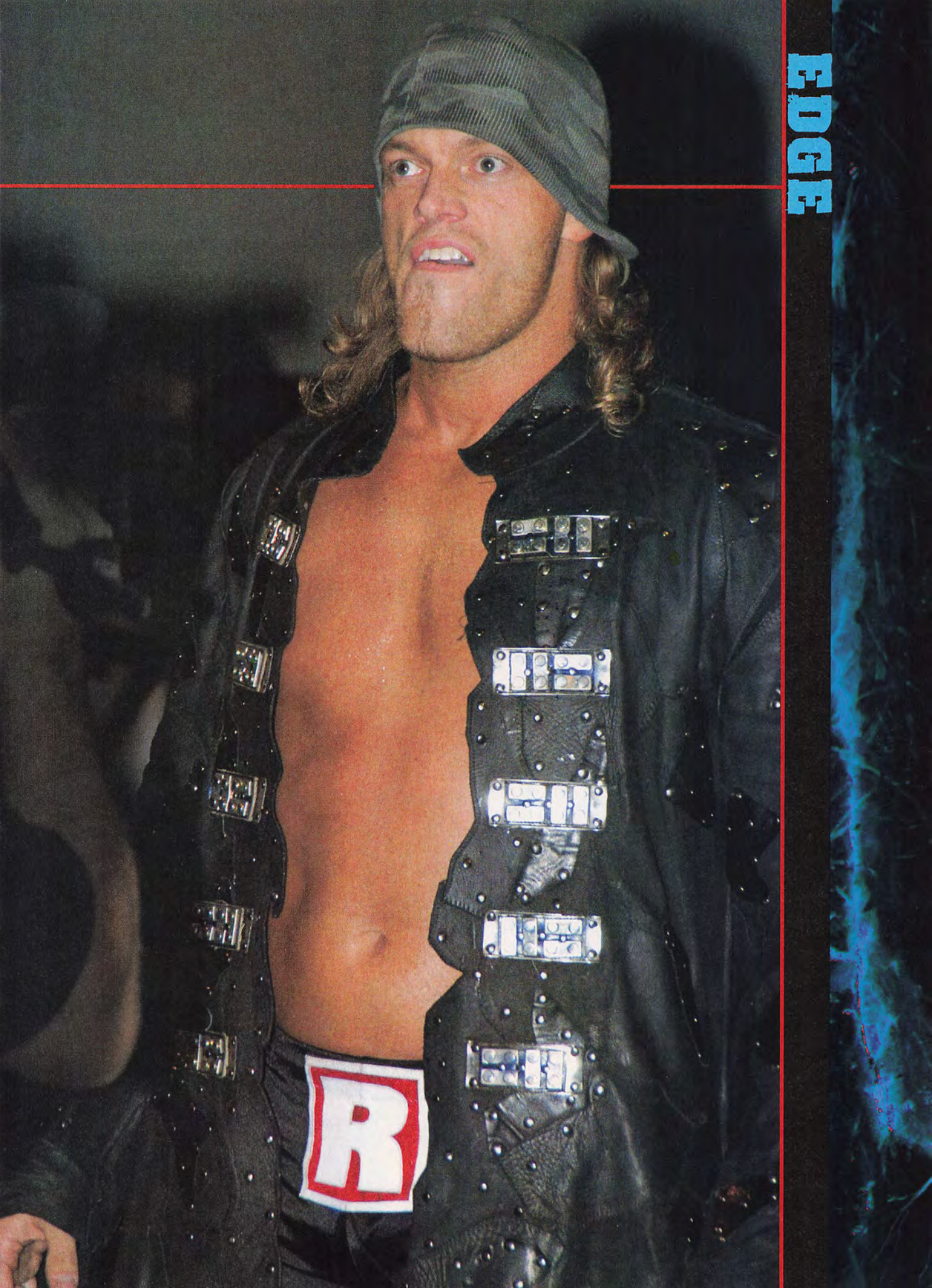
GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Edge capitalized on a series of injuries within Smackdown to become the top star of the blue brand. If he can keep his title from Batista, he has a good chance of dominating Smackdown ... at least until The Undertaker returns. But Edge vs. Undertaker could be a WrestleMania quality bout, which further underlines the fact that Edge has become one of the top three or four most important players in WWE today. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Ken Kennedy may be catching up, but Edge is the top villain in WWE today. As the saying goes, it ain't bragging if you can back it up. He's the most consistent and well-rounded wrestler in WWE today. **GRADE: A**



EDGE







1 Edge was part of the quartet of wrestlers who personified the Raw brand in 2006 and the first half of 2007. While it's hard to make the case that Edge has had a better year than John Cena, he proved to be more dominant than Michaels and Orton.

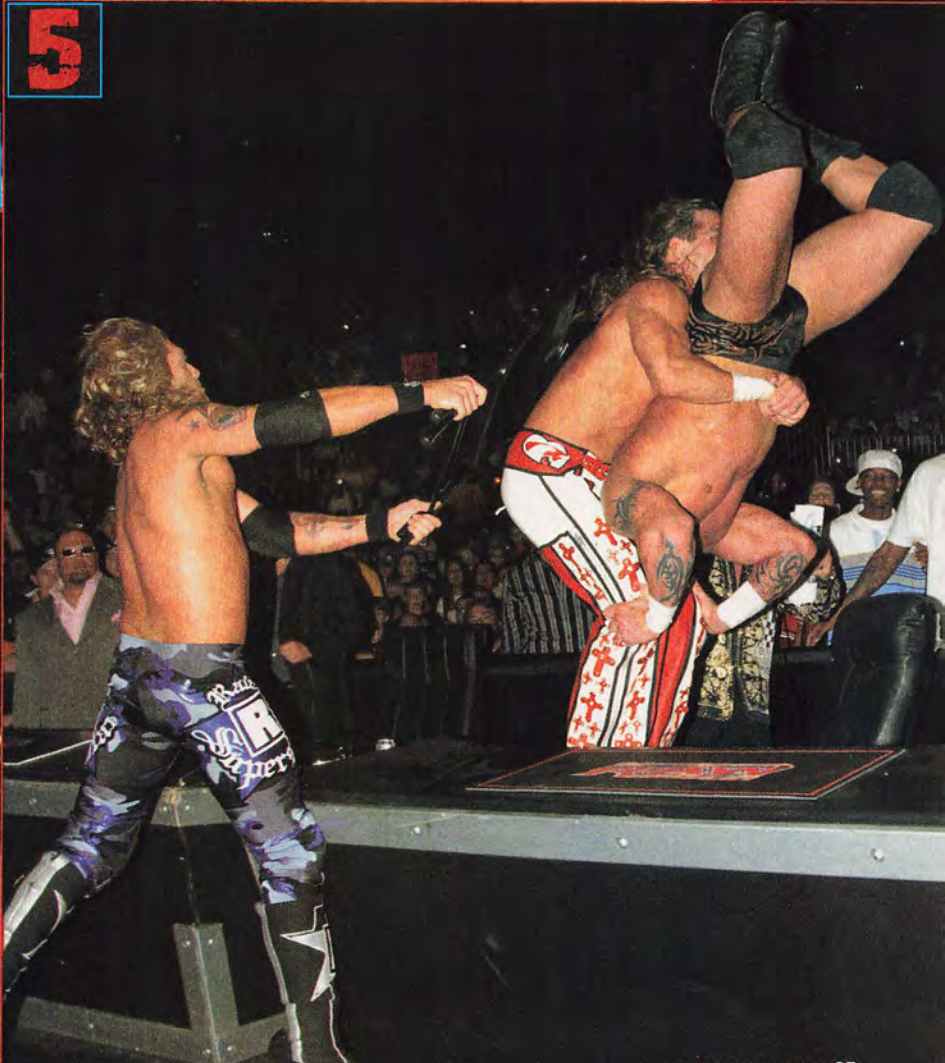
2 In his attempt to win his second "Money In The Bank" match, Edge suplexes Matt Hardy onto a ladder. Although it was Edge—not Hardy—who was carried out on a stretcher, it turned out to be Edge who would eventually cash in the MITB briefcase.

3 One key to Edge's recent success was his alliance with Randy Orton. Not only did Edge gain an ally in his nefarious schemes, but he also eliminated Orton as a potential rival. Oddly enough, Orton realized Edge was using him from the beginning.

4 After taking advantage of a battered Undertaker to capture the Smackdown World title, Edge went a long way toward proving he wasn't a paper champion by beating Batista inside a steel cage at One Night Stand. Batista vows revenge, however.

5 Edge's last high-profile shot at the Raw World title occurred at Backlash when champion John Cena defended against the "Rated R Superstar," Orton, and Michaels in a four-way match. Cena pinned Orton to retain the belt.

6 Many comparisons have been made between Edge and Triple-H, considering both men have reputations for playing over-the-top mind games. Edge fared well during Rated RKO's feud with DX, but how would he do in a singles feud with "The Game"?



SHAWN MICHAELS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When Shawn Michaels and Triple-H decided to re-form DeGeneration X last summer, they did it for two reasons. First, it would be a lot of fun. Secondly, it would make Vince McMahon furious. It started as fun and games with DX besting McMahon and The Spirit Squad countless times, and then Randy Orton and Edge raised the stakes with their horrific assault on Ric Flair. When Triple-H went down with a quadriceps injury, Michaels was forced to take a new course of action. Michaels put forth an outstanding, though ultimately losing, effort at The Royal Rumble. He did the same at WrestleMania 23 and Backlash. Michaels is wrestling better than he has in years as a singles competitor, but he has been unable to take the next step and regain the Raw World title. **GRADE: B+**

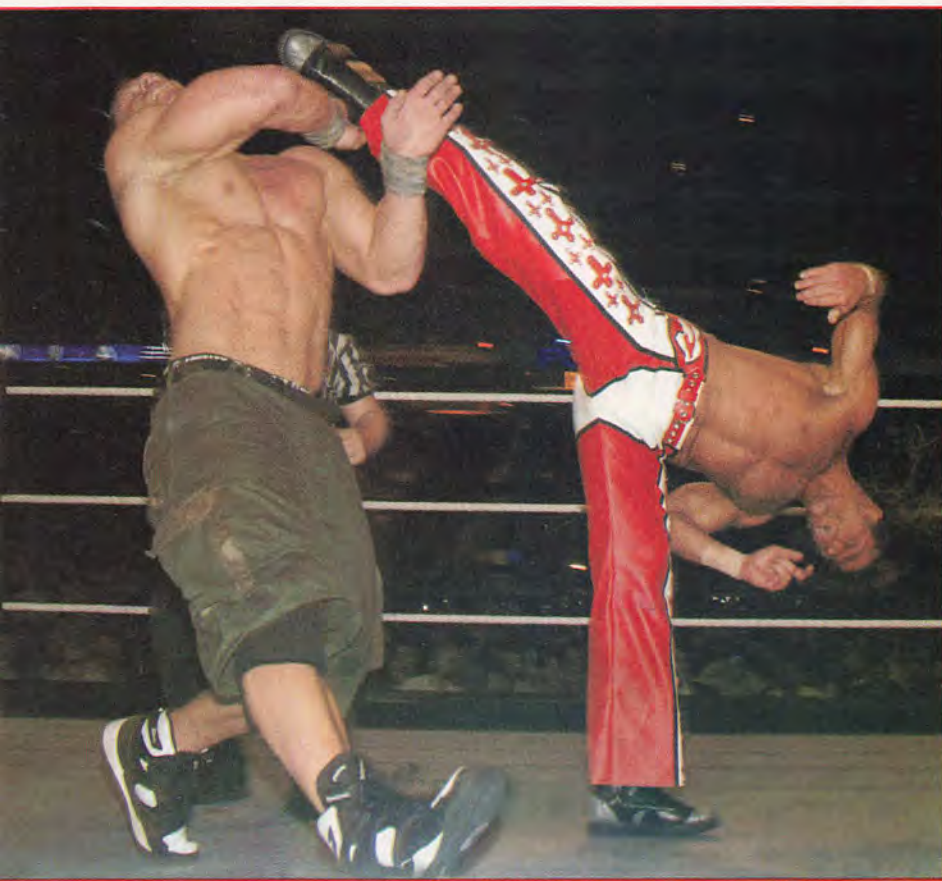
MARKETABILITY: Whether he's on his own or part of DX, the "Heartbreak Kid" is still one of the most marketable names in wrestling. He's still capable of

delivering five-star matches and living up to his nickname as "The Showstopper." **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: When Michaels came out of retirement in 2004, we wondered if his surgically repaired back could withstand the rigors of the ring. When Triple-H went down to injury over the winter, we wondered if Michaels could still be a legitimate singles force. Both times, Michaels proved he was better than his critics ever thought he could be. HBK has cut back on some of his higher-risk moves to protect his back, but has replaced those moves with quicker takedowns (particularly ankle pick-ups and legsweeps) and improved lateral movement that catches opponents flat-footed. We don't know how he does it, but Michaels is as quick and explosive as he was 10 years ago. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Last year, we gave Michaels in "A" in this category for remaining fresh and relevant, particularly after re-forming DX. This year, Michaels went one step beyond that, becoming one of the top two singles stars on the Raw brand and turning in a Match of the Year quality effort at WrestleMania. Michaels had a Hall of Fame caliber career before his comeback in 2004. Everything he's achieved since then only adds to that incredible legacy. **GRADE: A+**

OVERALL VALUE: It will be very interesting to see what happens when Triple-H returns from his injury this summer. Will he and Michaels reform DX and seek vengeance against Orton now that Edge has jumped to Smackdown? Or will the degenerates go their separate ways? Michaels currently is recuperating from a concussion suffered at Orton's hands. If he can return without any ill effects of that injury, Michaels—either with Triple-H, without Triple-H ... or possibly even against Triple-H—will be back in the main-event picture. He has name recognition, marketability, and can still deliver in the ring. He is an invaluable resource to WWE. **GRADE: A**



SHAWN
MICHAELS



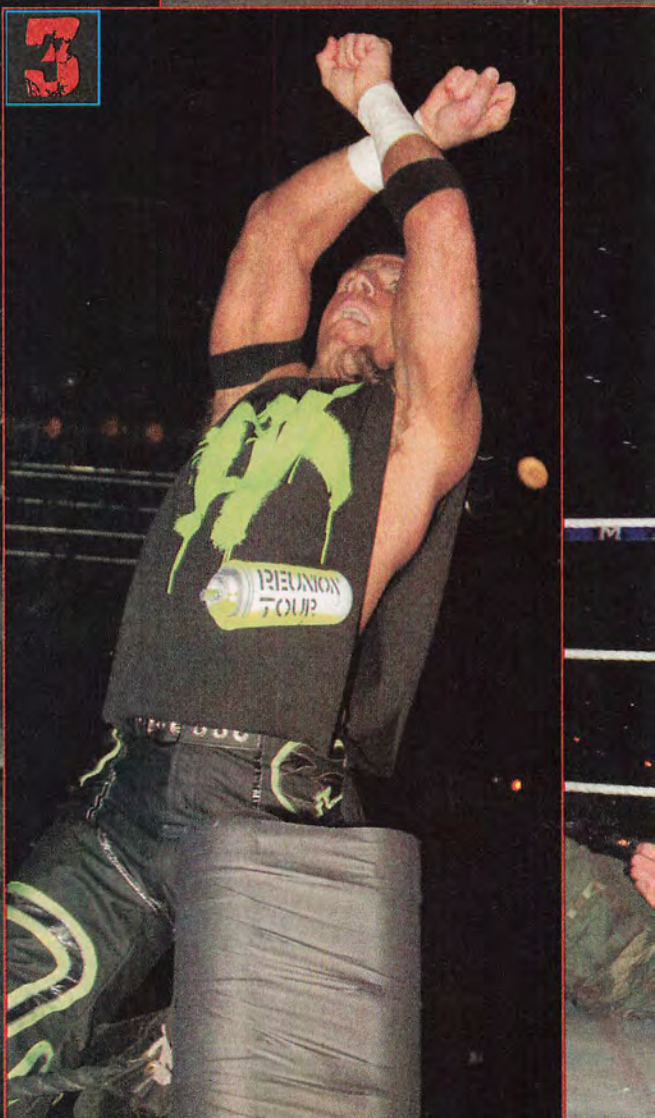
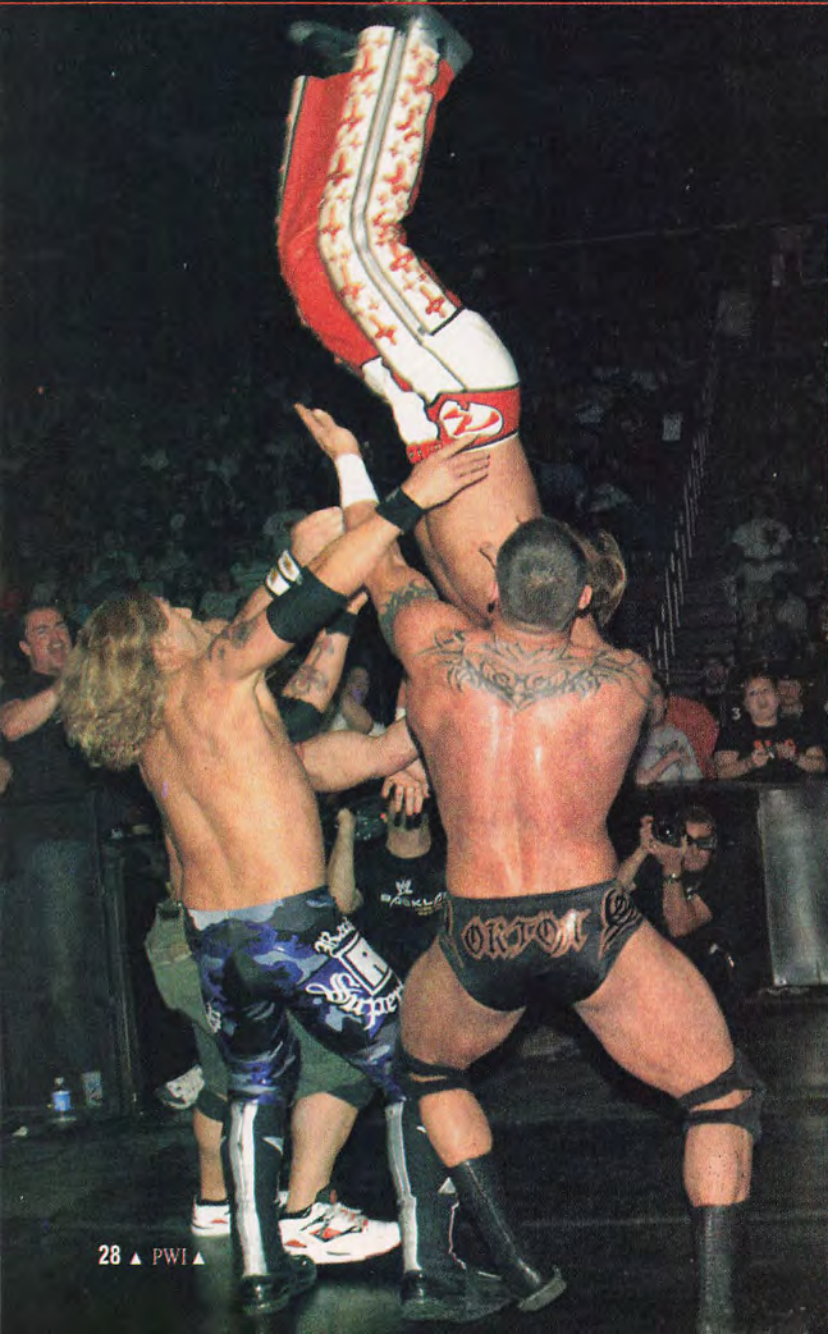
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3



SHAWN

MICHAELS



1 A feud with the McMahons is always sure to thrust any wrestler to main-event status, but after Helmsley was forced to take his hiatus, Michaels left the feud behind and went after those responsible for putting HHH out of commission: Rated RKO.

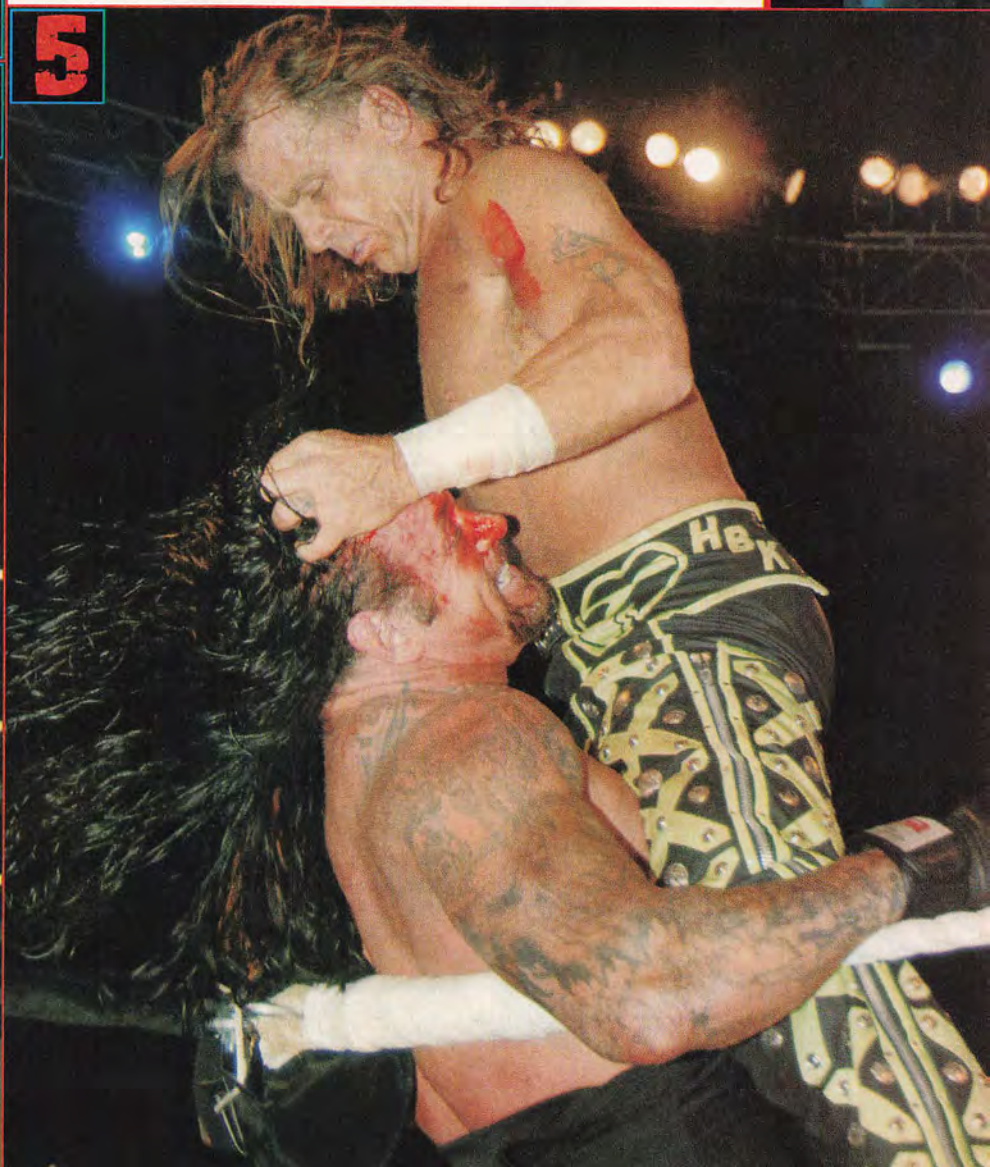
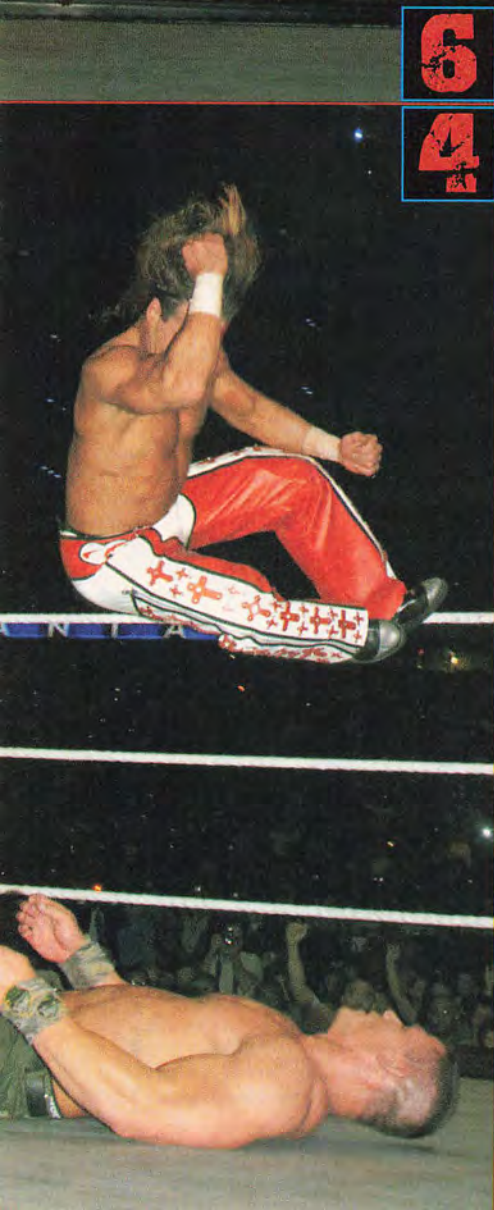
2 You would never guess that this guy diving headfirst onto WWE's finest is the same guy that left the ring in 1998 due to severe back injuries. But, lo and behold, here he is, nearly 10 years later, executing daring maneuvers even he never thought he would perform again.

3 It took just a few crotch chops to bring DX back together again last summer, but just as quickly as they reunited, Shawn Michaels and Triple-H were forced apart. After suffering a torn quadriceps, Triple-H left Michaels to fend for himself, and HBK came shining through on his own.

4 Cena was warned, but he just wouldn't listen. Michaels inevitably turns against his friends, and he continued the tradition when he superkicked Cena during the Raw before WrestleMania 23, guaranteeing a superior WM main event.

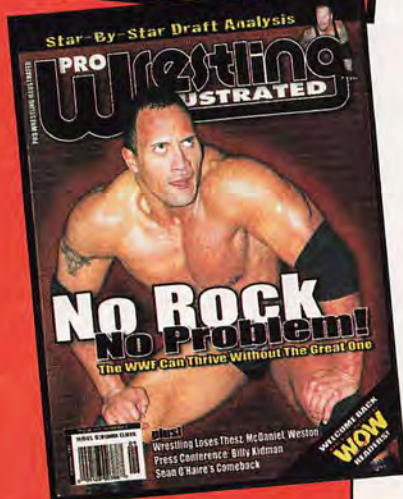
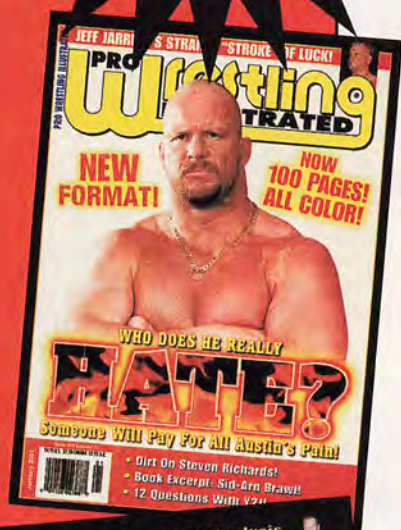
5 The 2007 Royal Rumble became a battle of legends when the battle royal was whittled down to Shawn Michaels and The Undertaker. The "Dead Man" took home the win, but Michaels sure made him work for it.

6 Michaels did not let Edge and Orton off the hook after they debilitated his fellow DXer. When Michaels joined with another superstar that had it in for Rated RKO, John Cena, Michaels and Cena took Edge and Orton's Raw World tag team belts.





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TAKESHI MORISHIMA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Earlier this year, the esteemed Cauliflower Alley Club presented Takeshi Morishima with its Future Legend Award. Obviously, the ring veterans that make up that highly respected organization think pretty highly of Morishima's skills. Since winning the Ring of Honor title from Homicide, Morishima has seemed to be the most dominant ROH champion since Samoa Joe, a wrestler Morishima resembles in both build and style. Despite being in wrestling for almost 10 years now, few Americans had even heard of Morishima before he debuted in ROH. Now he's considered one of the top big men in the game and someone who may use ROH as a springboard to a major title in Pro Wrestling NOAH or TNA. **GRADE: A+**

MARKETABILITY: Unlike other big-name Japanese stars who received the superstar treatment in ROH, including Jushin Liger, KENTA, and Kenta

Kobashi, Morishima was largely unknown by most of the ROH fan base when he debuted. While ROH fans are more likely to warm up to a Japanese wrestler with a limited grasp of English, there are a few obstacles that may prevent Morishima from becoming a commercially successful star in ROH. In addition to the language barrier, Morishima usually ignores ROH's so-called "Code Of Honor," attacking opponents instead of shaking hands. That said, ROH won't make the mistake of turning Morishima into a comedy figure, as WWE does with most of its Japanese stars. It's easy to imagine Morishima gaining a cult following. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Some people see Morishima's power and deceptive speed and compare him to Joe. Others look at his brawling skills and stiff suplexes and compare him to Terry Gordy. Some look at his cartwheel splashes and missile dropkicks and say he's the next Bam Bam Bigelow. We say he has elements from all three and more. Morishima throws the most dangerous suplex in the sport, usually slamming opponents hard on their neck or back. He has a unique blend of power and prowess, and may be the most athletic 300-pounder in the sport. **GRADE: A+**

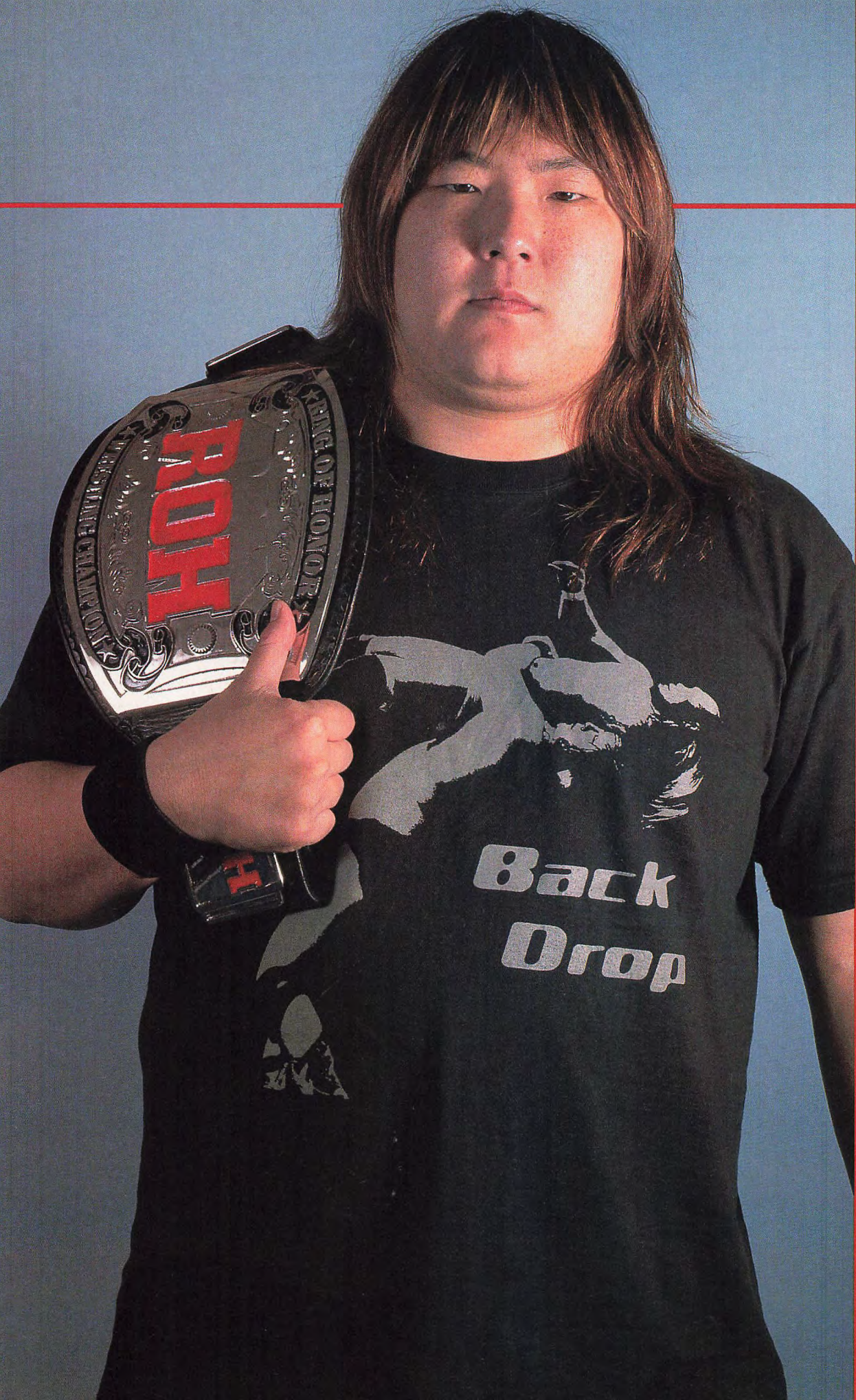
CAREER GROWTH: This has been a breakout year for Morishima. Yet, with a number of former ROH stalwarts now under exclusive TNA contracts, Morishima is not facing the superior level of competition former ROH champs have faced. At times, he appears to be coasting. Perhaps he's more concerned about NOAH's GHC title back home than the ROH title here. Although his commitment to the U.S.-based Ring of Honor has cost him a few fans in Japan, he's an impact player in two countries—and not too many wrestlers can say that. **GRADE: A+**

OVERALL VALUE: Morishima is just what ROH needed—a stiff, vicious champion the company doesn't have to worry about losing to TNA anytime soon. With the exodus of so many stars, ROH needed a fresh face on top. With Morishima's unique style, clashes against Nigel McGuinness and Bryan Danielson make for intriguing bouts that should carry the company for at least the next few months. **GRADE: A**



TAKESHI

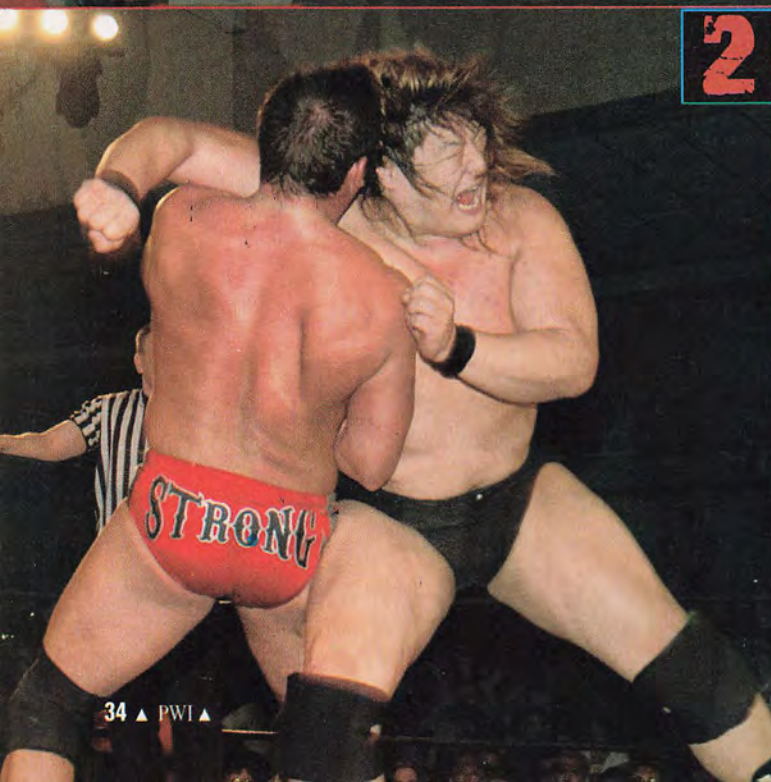
MORISHIMA



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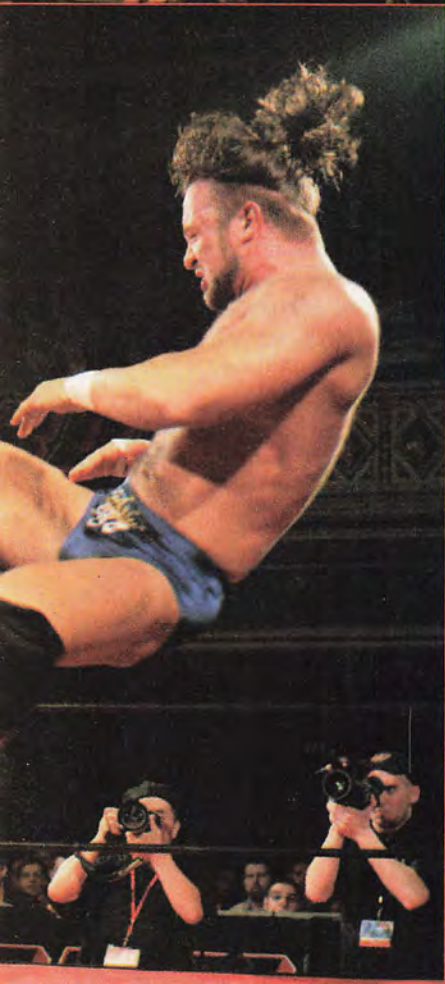
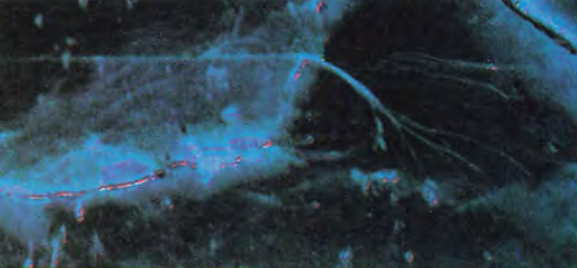
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1 Homicide didn't have the benefit of seeing many of Morishima's matches in person when he defended the Ring of Honor title against him in February. This missile dropkick was the first of several moves to catch him by surprise ... and he paid the price with his ROH belt.

2 The Ring of Honor champion's clotheslines are so effective because he puts his weight directly behind them, almost in a clothesline/shoulderblock combination. Full Impact Pro champion Roderick Strong has felt this first-hand.

3 Morishima enjoyed having Bryan Danielson as a reliable partner while he was tormenting Nigel McGuinness, but how much can he trust the former ROH champ? Quite wisely, Morishima doesn't trust him at all. Danielson wants to hold the ROH belt again.

4 B.J. Whitmer nails Morishima with a high knee during "Respect Is Earned," the first ROH event to be shown via video-on-demand. Morishima's quick rebound from this devastating blow was remarkable.

5 There is no cultural barrier here. Morishima blatantly chokes Strong across the middle rope with his leg, and the referee calls him on it. Many ROH wrestlers dislike Morishima because he openly disregards the company's "Code Of Honor."

6 Nigel McGuinness challenges Morishima immediately following the champ's successful title defense against Whitmer at "Respect Is Earned." Although Morishima didn't shirk from the challenge, ROH officials put them in a tag team match later in the evening.



THE UNDERTAKER

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Prior to tearing his right biceps in May, The Undertaker was having a career year in 2007. He became the first man in Royal Rumble history to parlay the 30th spot to a Rumble victory after a tremendous back-and-forth with Shawn Michaels, whom many pegged as the favorite in the match. When given his choice of champions to challenge, 'Taker chose the biggest dog in the yard, Batista. Then, at WrestleMania, he kept his vaunted undefeated streak alive by beating Batista to win his fifth world title in a bout that turned out to be a Match of the Year contender. Unfortunately, the injury bug bit at a terrible time and 'Taker is expected to be out of action until late-autumn. **GRADE: B+**

MARKETABILITY: Undertaker might have earned the moniker "The Phenom," but the most phenomenal thing about him has been his ability to consistently reinvent himself and stay fresh in the fans' eyes. As one of the few top stars left from WWE's last boom period of the late-1990s, Undertaker is universally recognized as one of WWE's biggest stars and a bona fide future Hall of Famer. By not appearing on TV week after week, he has smartly avoided becoming overexposed, giving an Undertaker match the feel of a special event. His larger-than-life persona lends itself to "Dead Man" biker T-shirts and poster sales. He is the most consistently marketable member of the WWE roster. **GRADE: A+**



REPERTOIRE: Years ago, 'Taker was criticized for his plodding, zombie-like attacks and one-dimensional offense. His interest in mixed martial arts, coupled with his added experience against top competitors, helped him add more and more to his game. Today, the "Dead Man" is one of the top submission artists in the business and is just as likely to win a match with a triangle choke or dragon sleeper as he is with a last ride power bomb or tombstone piledriver. He is extremely well-rounded and rarely gets surprised. **GRADE: A+**

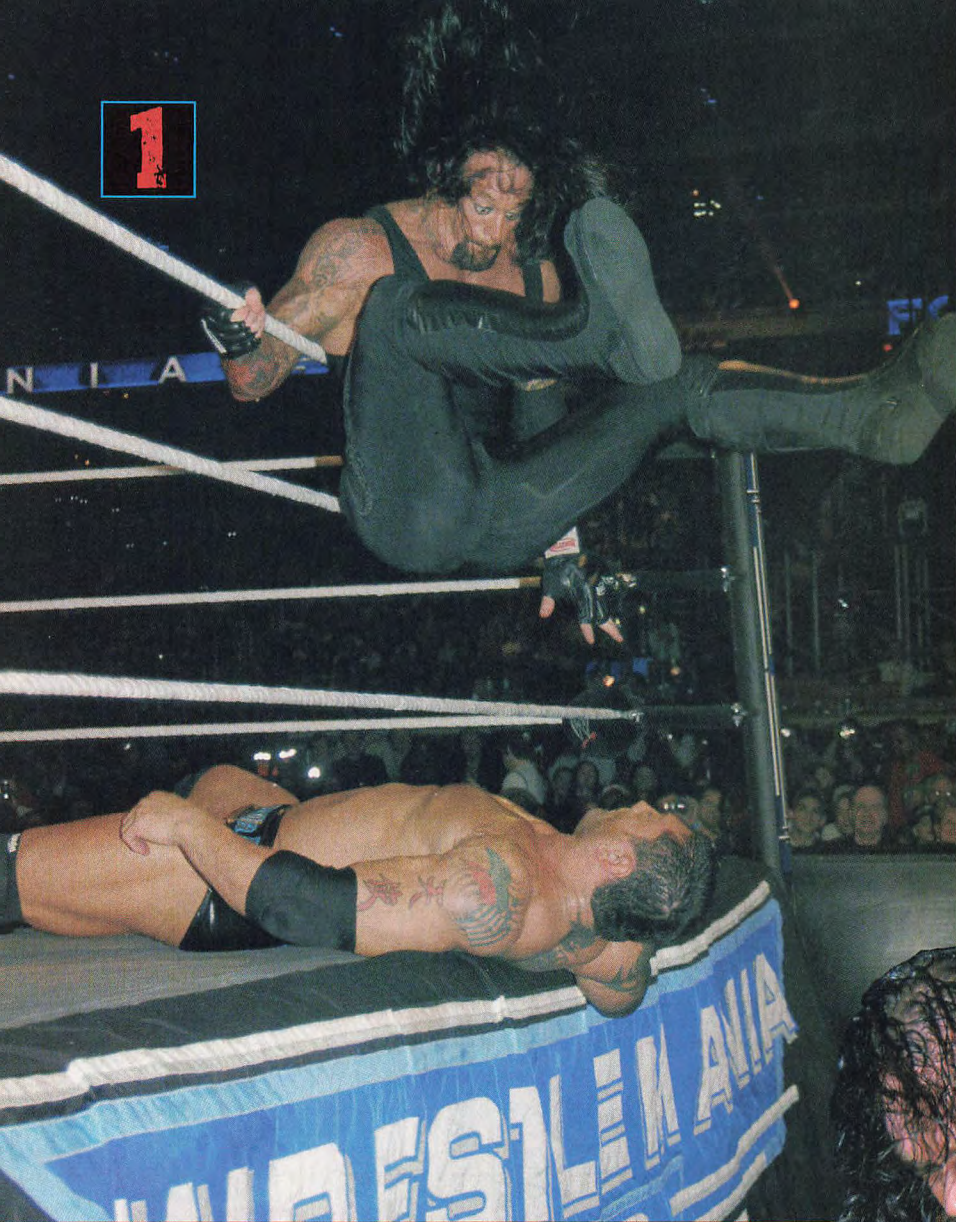
CAREER GROWTH: With his impressive performances at the Rumble and WrestleMania, Undertaker reminded everyone that—even after 18 years in the game—he's still in his prime. 'Taker is still a world title contender. He's still a main-event performer. He's not a legend living on the laurels of his past. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: The younger guard of John Cena, Bobby Lashley, and Batista has struggled at times, and each has felt a degree of fan backlash. Though they may not necessarily realize it, having Undertaker around helps them. He takes some of the pressure off younger stars by constantly generating interest and keeping fans entertained. A win over 'Taker can make a young lion famous. Not only is Undertaker a top draw in the ring, but he's also WWE's elder statesman. He may be the most respected active wrestler in the game. Add that to the fact that he's still willing to bust his tail in the ring, and you have an invaluable resource. **GRADE: A**

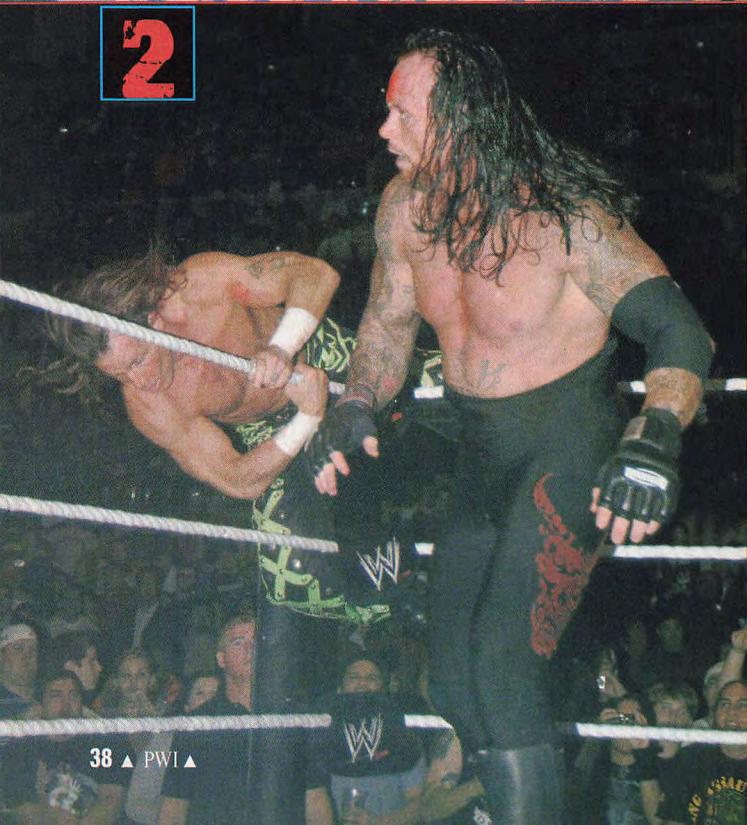
THE UNDERTAKER



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THE UNDERTAKER



1 The Undertaker received a shot at any major title of his choosing at WrestleMania, as a result of his win at the Rumble. Undertaker ended up winning the Smackdown World title from Batista, who was no match for the "Dead Man's" legdrop on the ring apron.

2 Because it seemed as if nothing could stop Shawn Michaels from headlining against Raw champ John Cena at WrestleMania 23, it was a surprise when The Undertaker—the number-30 entrant—eliminated Michaels to win the Royal Rumble.

3 At Backlash, The Undertaker defended his newly won Smackdown World title against Batista in a last-man-standing match. Here, 'Taker rocks the bloodied former champion with right hands in the corner.

4 Even the tombstone piledriver, a maneuver still frowned upon by WWE management, is not enough to pin the mighty Batista. While The Undertaker got the better of their four-month feud, it came to a premature end when 'Taker suffered a torn right biceps.

5 Mistakenly assuming that Ken Kennedy's mouth is his biggest weapon, The Undertaker clasps his hand around the Green Bay native's throat in late-2006. The Undertaker should have been more worried about Kennedy's wrestling skills than his ring announcing.

6 Although The Undertaker was very aggressive against Kennedy, as evidenced by this wicked chairshot, he might have stood a better chance of winning if he had concentrated on wrestling. Kennedy handed 'Taker one of his few losses over the past year.



FINLAY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Back in 1998, Finlay suffered a severe laceration to his leg during a WCW hardcore match against Brian Knobs that put a premature end to his wrestling career. Doctors said there was just a 50 percent chance Finlay would never walk again. In 2006, at the age of 47, Finlay made one of the unlikely comebacks ever, working a full-time schedule on Smackdown. Over the past 12 months, Finlay made that comeback even more remarkable, beating Bobby Lashley to win the U.S. title in July 2006 and competing in the "Money In The Bank" ladder match at WrestleMania. Even if you don't care for Finlay's style or tactics, you can't help but be impressed with what he's accomplished. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Surprisingly, Finlay has developed a sizeable cult following. Maybe it's the fact that his offense seems so unorthodox compared to many younger wrestlers. Maybe it's because he's Irish. Maybe it's because of Hornswoggle. If you visit wweshop.com, you'll find Finlay's "I Love To Fight" T-shirt and a 24-inch inflatable shillelagh. Admittedly, you have to search a bit to find it, but 10 years ago, who would have thought WWE fans would be buying

inflatable shillelaghs in honor of "Fit" Finlay? **GRADE: B**

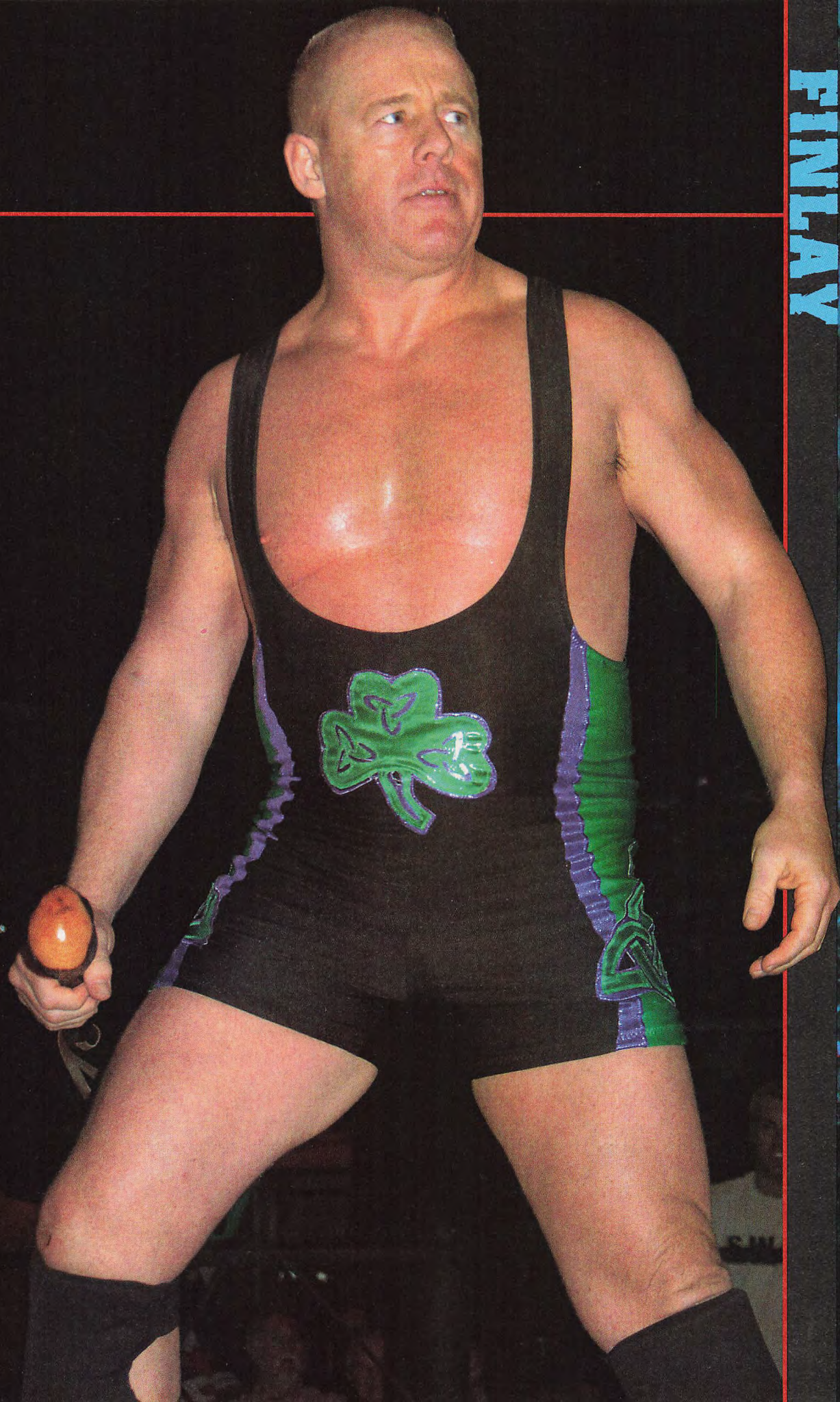
REPERTOIRE: Finlay is one of the rare wrestlers who would feel just as comfortable taking care of business in a bar fight as he would competing on an amateur mat. Unlike many wrestlers who will use a scientific style until they lose their cool and resort to brawling, Finlay actually manages to merge the two styles. He'll shoot in low and take down an opponent with a rolling fireman's carry, lock in his opponent's arm at the elbow, and begin grinding his fist into his hapless opponent's temple. His crossfaces are as stiff as a closed fist to the bridge of the nose. Every move he makes in the ring is designed to inflict maximum punishment on his opponent—as it should be. Finlay stands with Ric Flair and William Regal as the most technically sound and efficient competitors in any WWE brand today. **GRADE: A**

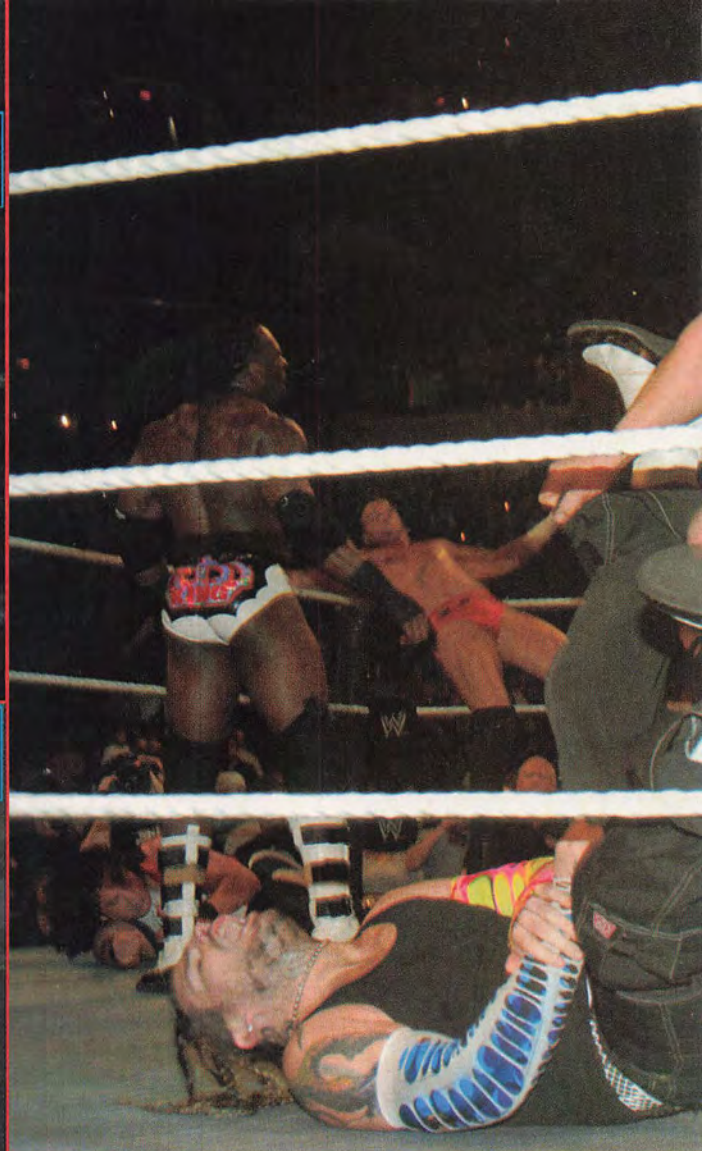
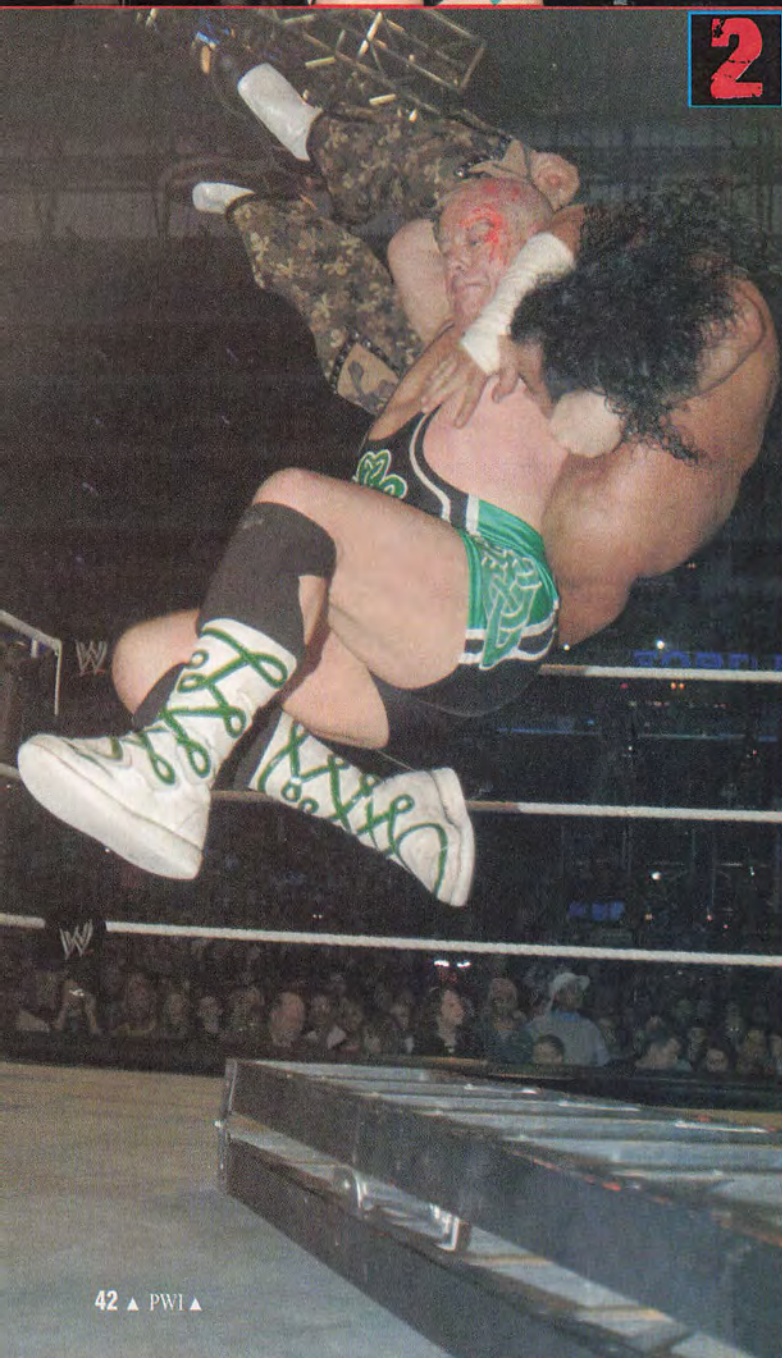
CAREER GROWTH: Finlay has found a good niche on Smackdown. He's still a threat to regain the U.S. title, and has come remarkably close to winning the World title several times. He's gone from being a middle-aged and crazy newcomer to being an elder statesman of the Smackdown brand in less than two years time. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: If you want to know Finlay's true value, take a close look at his series against Lashley last summer. Finlay helped Lashley develop from a raw powerhouse to a formidable competitor. By wrestling Finlay, a wrestler is forced to learn the art of counter-wrestling, how to conserve energy, and how to keep his guard up at all times. Like Flair, Finlay is invaluable as a mentor even though his days in the main event may be nearing an end. **GRADE: A-**



FINLAY







1 Finlay is a crowd favorite, not only because of his awe-inspiring grappling skills, but also for the comic fodder accompanying him by way of his tiny sidekick, Hornswoggle. Hornswoggle also comes in handy as a method of diversion and as a weapon.

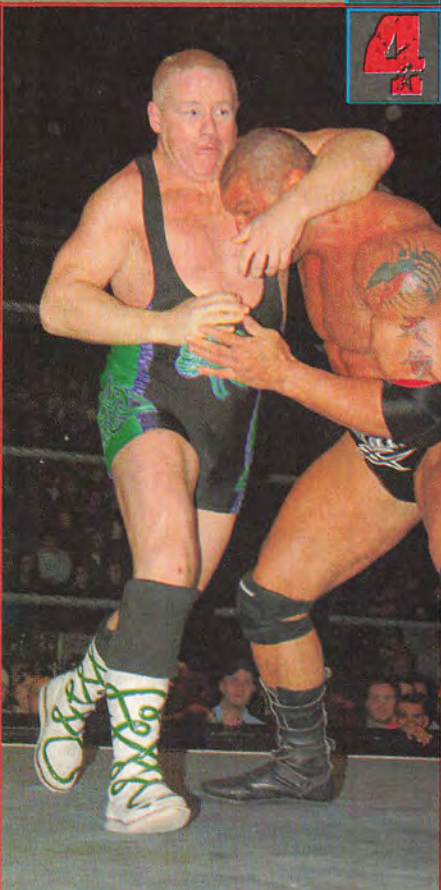
2 While his weapon of choice is often a shillelagh, Finlay showed how well he can utilize a ladder at WrestleMania 23 when he dropped Matt Hardy onto the steel during the "Money In The Bank" ladder match.

3 He may be one of the oldest stars on the WWE roster, but the 48-year-old Finlay can compete against even the youngest and most vibrant talent. At this year's Royal Rumble, 21-year-old Kenny Dykstra realized that younger doesn't always mean better.

4 The former "Fit" Finlay must still be in pretty good shape to be able to give "The Animal" an impressive challenge. He may have dropped the nickname, but he held on to his remarkable strength.

5 With a penchant for barroom-style brawling, Dave Finlay is on par with one of the most respected veterans of the game, Ric Flair. Flair's grimace is telling of just how sour a Finlay knuckle sandwich can be.

6 Almost as treacherous as Finlay's fist is Finlay's boot. While he is an experienced technical grappler, the Irishman often resorts to the old-fashioned style of wrestling, complete with punches, kicks, and—as Jeff Hardy experienced here—stomps.



KEN KENNEDY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Kennedy continued his remarkable rise at WrestleMania, winning the vaunted "Money In The Bank" ladder match to earn a shot at any major championship he wished. But just when it looked as if Kennedy was on the fast track to the top of Smackdown, two things happened. First, he inexplicably announced he wouldn't cash in his MITB shot until WrestleMania 24, essentially making himself a marked man for opportunists like Edge. Then Kennedy suffered a back injury that was projected to keep him out of action for several months, killing his momentum and putting his announced title shot in jeopardy. Edge took advantage of Kennedy's misfortune and became Smackdown World champion. Kennedy got some of his momentum back when he was drafted to Raw, but he's going to have to work his way back up to where he was before the injury.

GRADE: A-

MARKETABILITY: The man with the penchant for old-school ring announcements may be the most marketable commodity who has yet to wear a world title in WWE. Kennedy has natural charisma and star quality. The fans can't wait to see Kennedy become a fan favorite, even if that means turning him on their own with their cheers. Kennedy excels in the areas where John Cena and Bobby Lashley struggle. He can captivate an audience in a way no one has since The Rock. All he needs to become a big-time star is to become a fan favorite. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: As much as Kennedy oozes that "superstar-in-training" vibe, there are still a lot of questions about just how good he is. He put forth an impressive effort against Batista at the Royal Rumble, but, in many ways, Kennedy has yet to be truly tested. A large part of his offense depends upon Kennedy being able to overpower his opponents and hoist them up for his version of the Samoan drop and other high-impact moves. Does Kennedy have enough depth to succeed against competition he can't overpower? And if a pure wrestler forces him to grapple, will he be over-matched? **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: Up until the injury, Mr. Kennedy was in perfect position to assume the mantle of Smackdown's top star. Now that he's on Raw, the competition will be greater and more intense. If he's ready, he could become a superstar on par with John Cena and Edge. **GRADE: A+**

OVERALL VALUE: Provided Kennedy can fully recover from his injuries and can overcome the mental frustration at having a WrestleMania title shot stolen from him, he has the potential to become one of Raw's top stars. But those are some major "ifs." He has a tremendous upside, but the coming year will be the most important of his career. **GRADE: A-**



KEN
KENNEDY



DON'T MISS

PWI UPDATE

WITH

FRANK INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON:
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Pro Wrestling Illustrated Managing Editor Frank Ingiosi, is insightful, provocative, and downright funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in *PWI*. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Ingiosi On Undertaker vs. Henry: "The Undertaker looked great, hitting spot after spot and manhandling Henry as if he were a sack of potatoes (which, ironically, will rank three spots higher than Henry in this year's *PWI* 500.)"

Ingiosi On Joey Styles' Promo: "Nothing was sacred, as Styles attacked some of the company's ridiculous storylines, as well as the chairman himself. Basically, for one beautiful three-minute span, Styles was the voice of every disgruntled fan."

Ingiosi On WWE Women: "I hope something relatively interesting happens soon, because I'm actually getting tired of this weekly, mind-numbingly repetitive catfight between Mickie James, Ashley, and Trish. It's actually gotten to the point where it bores me both as a wrestling fan and as a man. Did I just write that?"

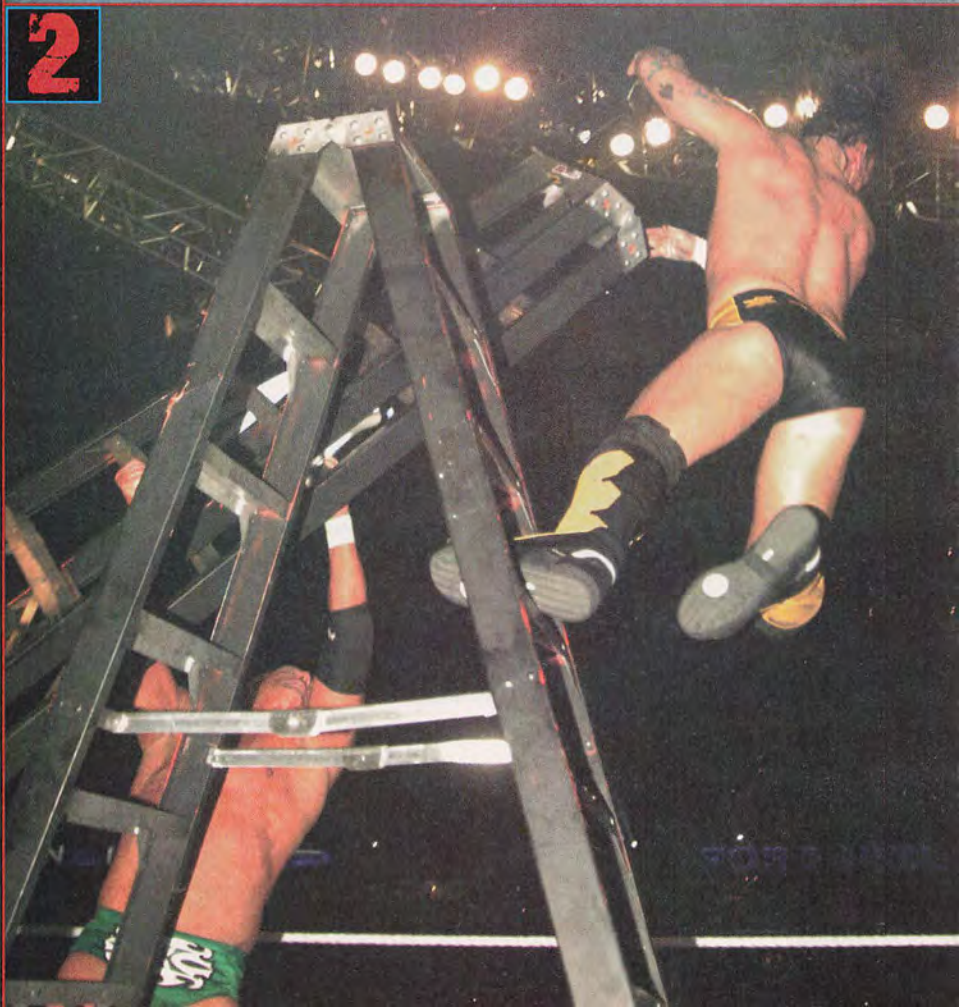
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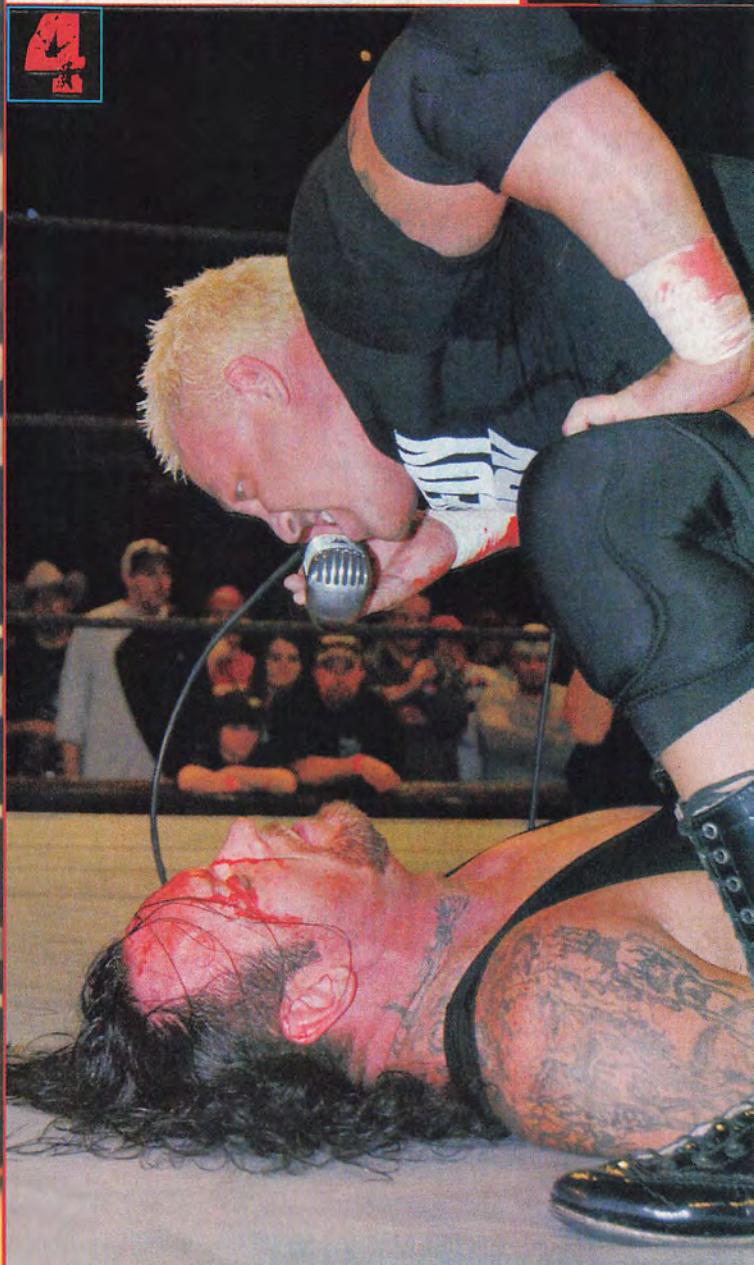
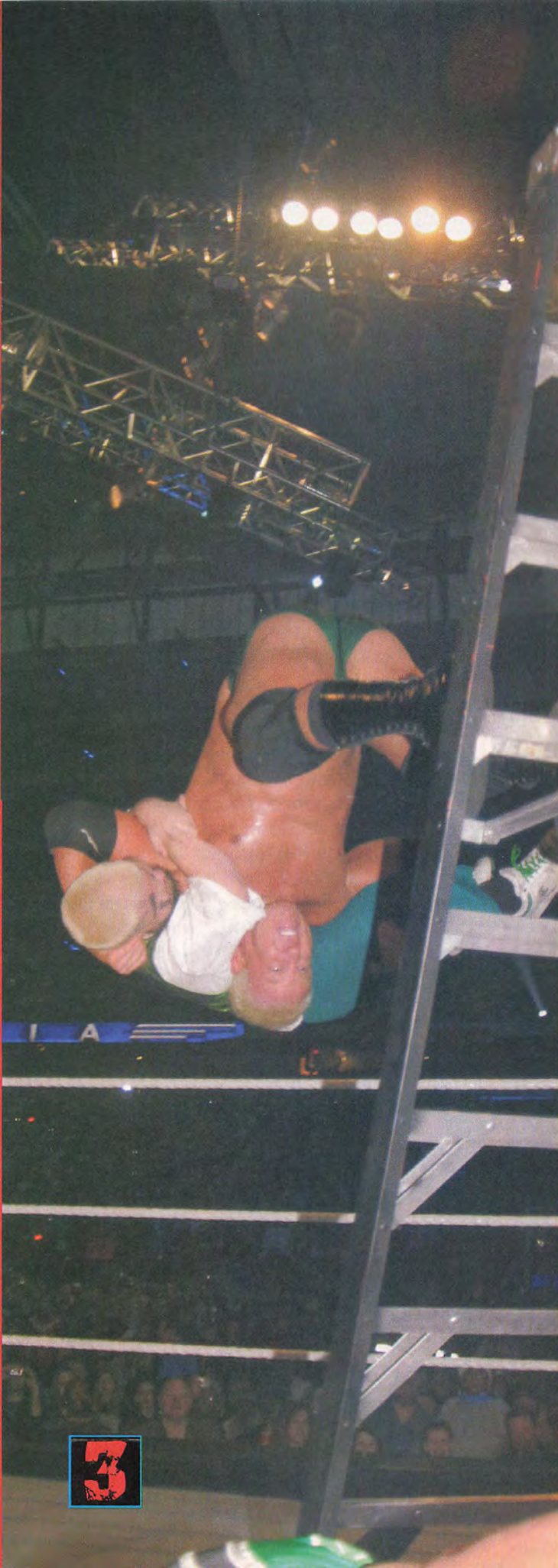


1 Kennedy proved he had the potential to become a main-eventer when he pushed Batista to the limit last year. The Green Bay native wisely neutralized Batista with holds such as armlocks and wristlocks instead of going toe-to-toe with the big man.

2 At WM 23's "Money in The Bank" match, Kennedy prevents one of the match's favorites, C.M. Punk, from recovering the MITB briefcase. Had it not been for a subsequent back injury, this win could have paid huge dividends to Kennedy come WrestleMania 24.

3 Most fans feel guilty pleasure as Kennedy drops Finlay's leprechaun, Hornswoggle, with a Lambeau leap off the ladder during the "Money in The Bank" match at WrestleMania 23. But that move didn't endear Kennedy to Finlay, his former ally.

4 The Undertaker must be living a nightmare as he endures Kennedy's loud mouth via the house microphone. Kennedy attacked Undertaker and left him laying flat on his back, guaranteeing that 'Taker would have to listen to what he had to say.



RANDY ORTON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The "Legend Killer" has spent the past three years trying to get back to what he was in 2004: the champion of the Raw brand. He's experienced a string of setbacks, both inside the ring and outside of it. In many cases, Orton had only himself to blame for his troubles, often being disciplined by WWE management. It may seem odd, considering the falling-out they had, but perhaps the best thing ever to happen to Orton since he was drummed out of Evolution in 2004 was forming a partnership with Edge. Rated RKO brought out the worst in both Edge and Orton, and each man became more bloodthirsty and savage through their association. With Edge, Orton managed to gain a bit of payback against his old nemesis, Triple-H, putting him out of action for the first half of 2007. After splitting with Edge, Orton has cut a swath of devastation through WWE, also mowing down Shawn Michaels and Rob Van Dam. Finally, Orton looks like he's ready to wear the Raw World title belt again. **GRADE: A**

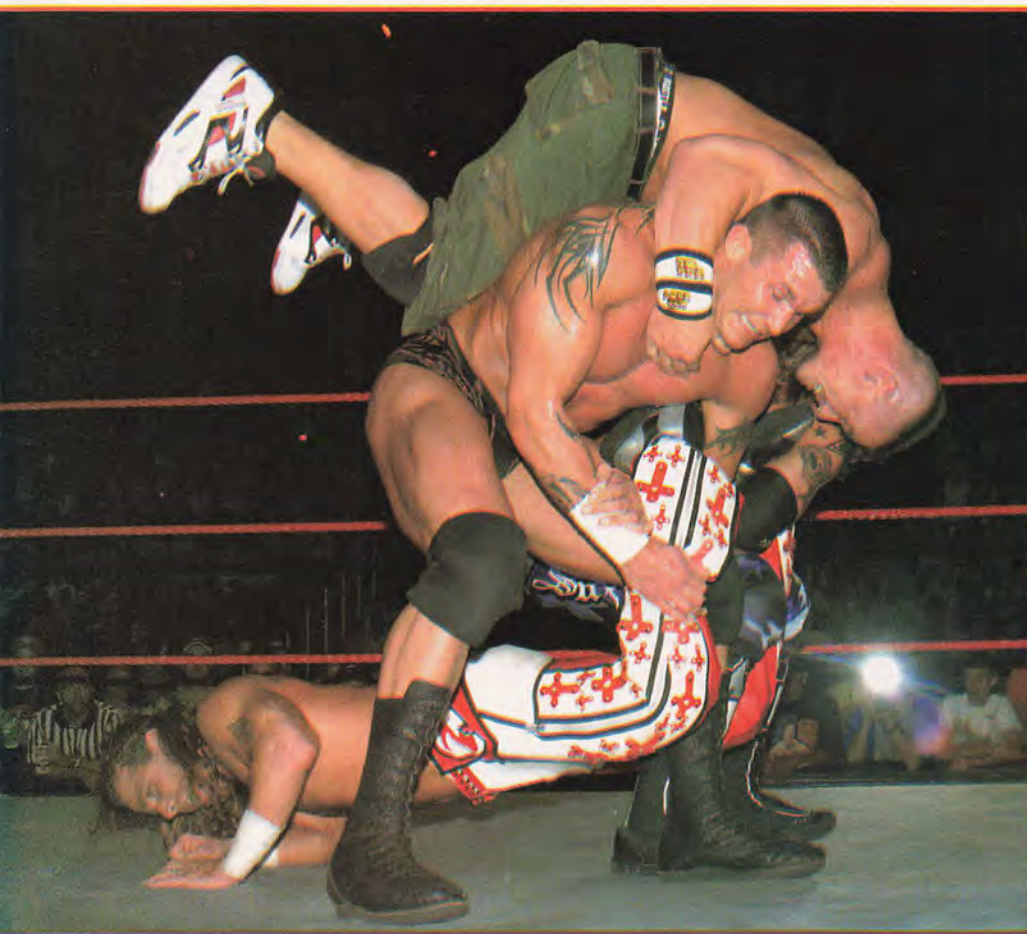
MARKETABILITY: Orton never looked comfortable as a fan favorite. He's much happier doing his own thing, and letting the fans react to him as they will. In fact, he seems to enjoy being booed and jeered, just as his father and grandfather did before him. He may not sell as much merchandise as many fan favorites, but Orton can become a major draw as the man fans love to hate. With his athletic good looks and eternal smirk, Orton is the perfect nemesis for John Cena. When it finally erupts, that rivalry could become 2007's Feud of the Year. **GRADE: B+**

REPERTOIRE: Orton has added a few major pieces to his offensive repertoire, which has helped him become a markedly more dangerous wrestler. For one thing, he has perfected a yakuza kick that would make Toshiaki Kawada and Masa Chono envious. That vicious kick to the head has left both Michaels and Van Dam concussed. He often follows

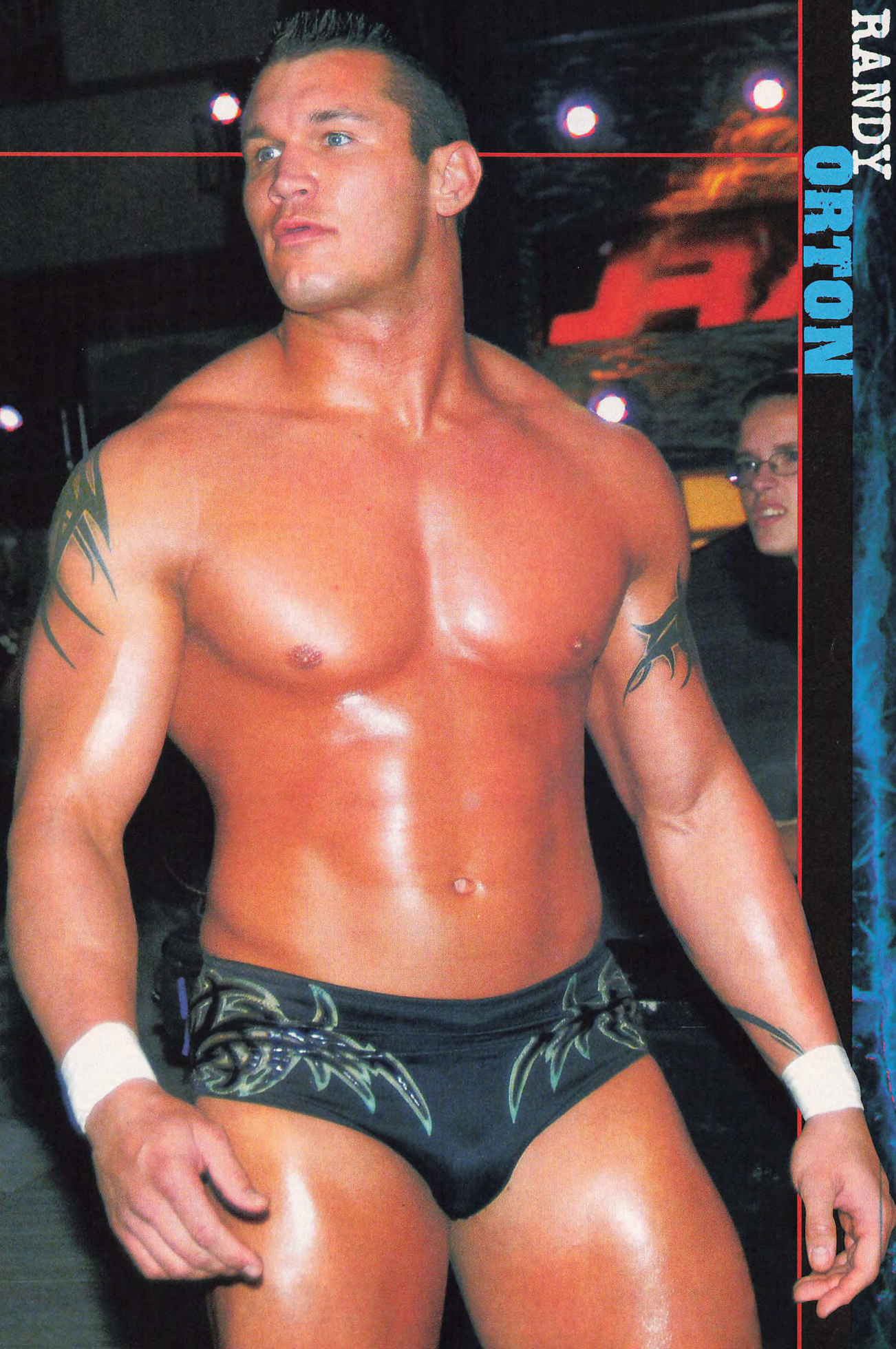
that kick with a brutal DDT to the floor, often with his opponent's legs raised onto the ringside guardrail, forcing the full weight of both men to come down fully on his opponent's face or head. Together with his array of wear-down holds (usually side chinlocks), set-up moves (neckbreakers and spectacular suplexes), and his lethal RKO, Orton is as formidable a wrestler as you'll find anywhere. **GRADE: A**

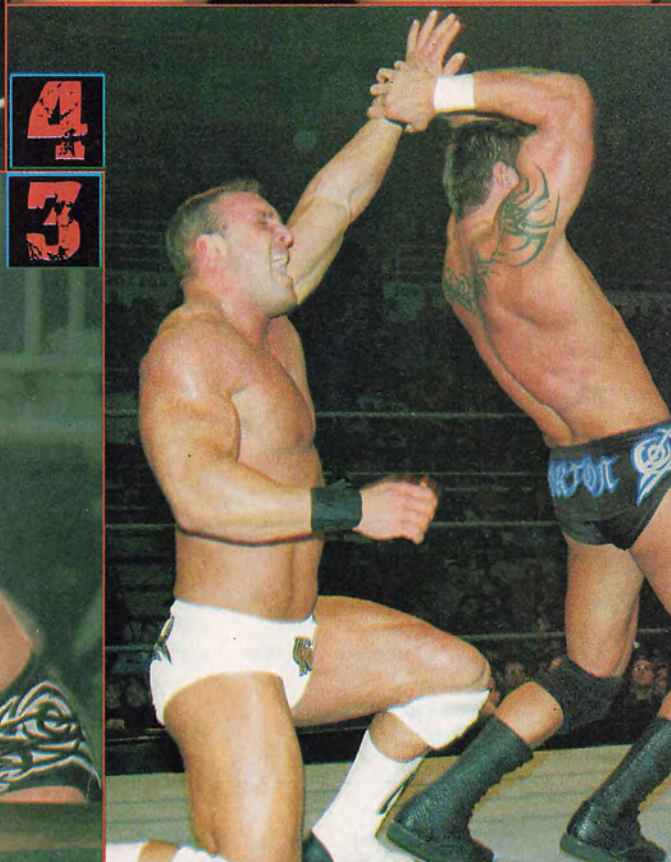
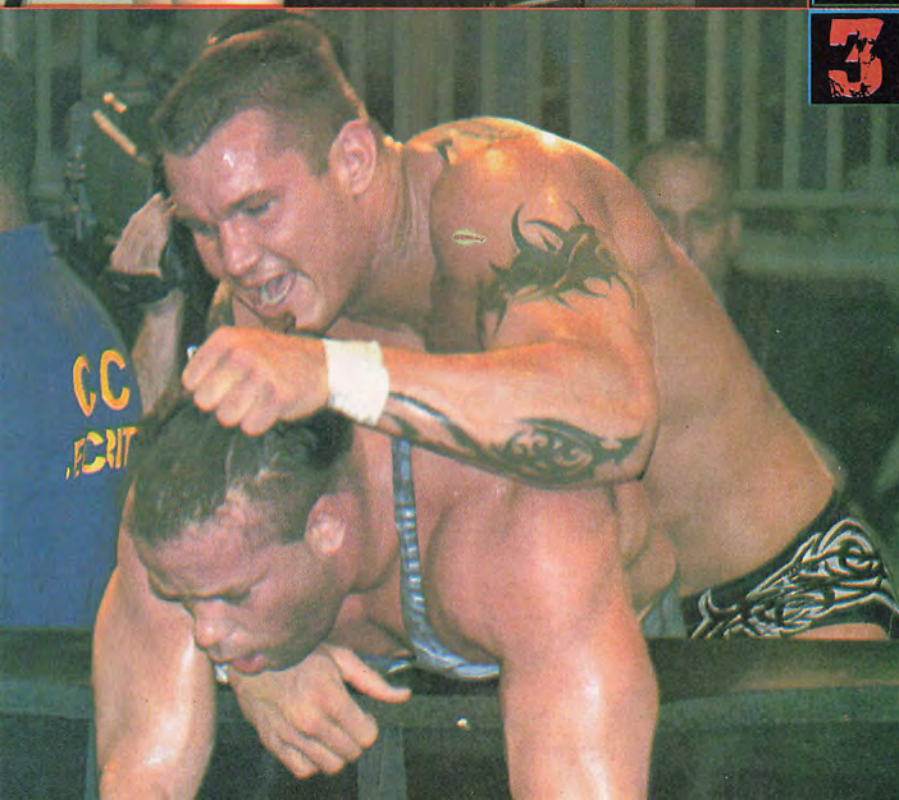
CAREER GROWTH: Orton has been held back for too long. He has adopted a new ruthlessness, and it has paid dividends. We predict he'll be wearing the Raw World title by December 31. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Orton has reclaimed his mantle as the "chosen one" of the Raw brand. But until he beats Cena, he's still a distant second to "The Champ." **GRADE: A-**



RANDY
ORTON







1 During the four-way main event at Backlash, Orton and Edge put aside their differences to coordinate their attacks against Shawn Michaels and defending Raw World champion John Cena. Simultaneous one-legged Boston crabs indicated they had put quite a bit of thought into the partnership.

2 Orton and Edge was never a happy couple. Both understood that Rated RKO was a marriage of convenience from the outset, and it was no surprise that the two had frequent disagreements. We know what Orton is thinking while he's holding that steel chair.

3 Considering how Orton seemed to give Rob Van Dam a major concussion on Raw, it was a surprise that RVD was able to rebound and defeat the third-generation superstar at One Night Stand. It was yet another setback for Orton.

4 Rarely does Randy Orton face an opponent who is stronger, but that's what happened whenever he wrestled Chris Masters on Raw. Here, Orton twists Masters' arm, bringing the big man to his knees. Orton is expert at adapting his game to his opponent.

5 A cocky man whose opinion of himself was increased by becoming the youngest world champion in WWE history, Orton felt he would march right through John Cena for the Raw World title. It hasn't happened yet, but even Cena would admit Orton's given him some of his toughest battles.

6 After their inevitable falling-out, Orton blasts Edge with a right hand. When Orton got in trouble with the WWE brass for his wild behavior outside the ring, it was assumed that he would be booted from Raw. That wasn't the case.



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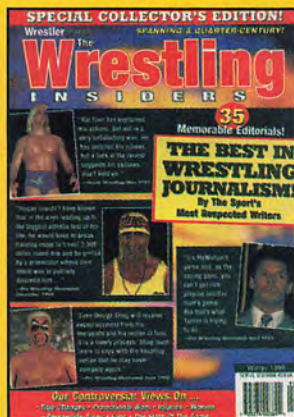
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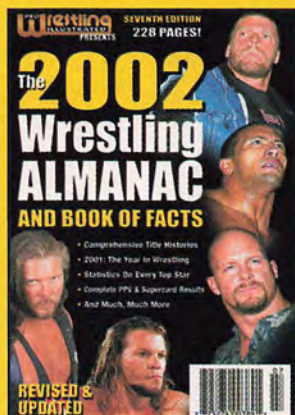
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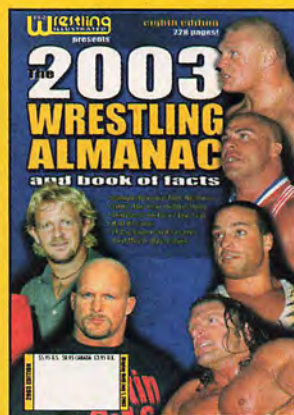
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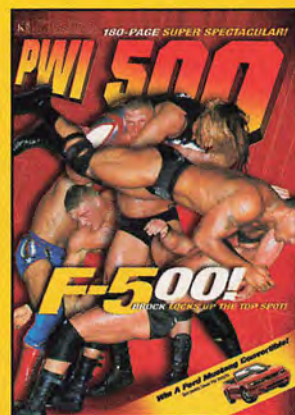
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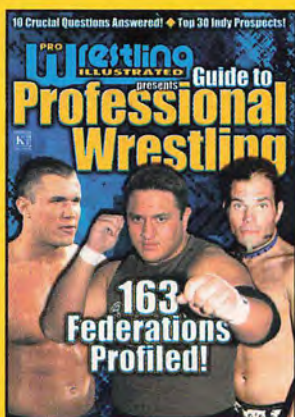
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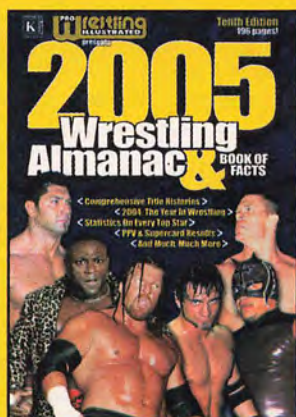


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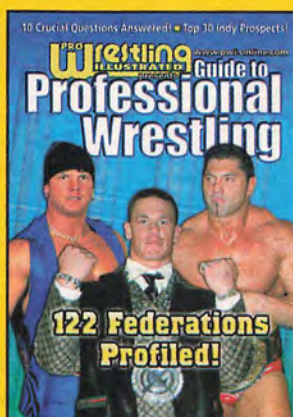
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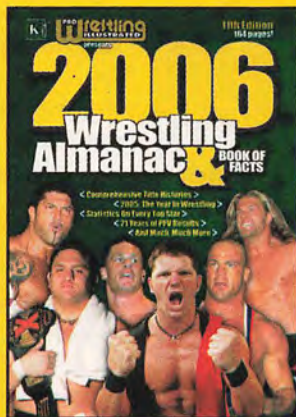


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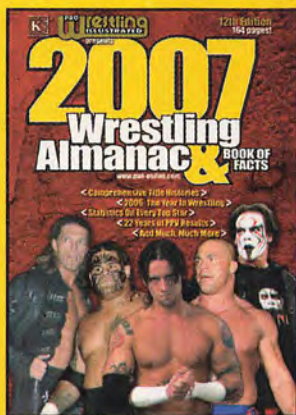
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**COLLECTOR'S
ISSUES**

C.M. PUNK

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Ring of Honor diehards were left with a bittersweet taste in their mouths following the 2006 Survivor Series. After decisively defeating Team RKO, the team of C.M. Punk, Shawn Michaels, Triple-H, and Matt and Jeff Hardy celebrated on the entrance ramp. Punk stood sandwiched between Michaels and Triple-H, with DX holding his hands high in victory. You can actually see an expression of downright giddiness in Punk's face, as if to say, "I've made the big time at last." Punk overcame several obstacles to finally arrive in WWE. He's arguably the most popular wrestler in ECW. After about a year with the brand, Punk has yet to seriously contend for the ECW title. Bobby Lashley's forced abdication of the title may be the opportunity he needs. **GRADE: B+**

MARKETABILITY: Punk has an undeniable charisma about him. He also has a unique look and attitude that helps him stand out from the pack. He's one of the few wrestlers on the ECW brand with any "street cred," meaning he would have fit in perfectly with the original company. Punk's name is going to sell a lot of merchandise ... especially if the WWE marketing department can land him a Pepsi endorsement. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Since his debut in ECW, Punk has favored more of a striking style, relying heavily on his muay thai and kickboxing skills. That style has been effective, so Punk hasn't had to utilize his array of moonsaults, suicide dives, or even his famed top rope pedigree. Punk is a true student of the game with a ridiculously large collection of wrestling tapes from Japan, Europe, and Mexico. He is always adding new moves and holds to his arsenal. There's no telling what the next move he will unveil might be.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Punk fell into a bit of a funk after the 2006 Survivor Series. He suffered clean losses to Hardcore Holly, Matt Striker, and Ken Kennedy. He failed to capitalize on opportunities in both the "Extreme Elimination Chamber" bout at December to Dismember and the "Money In The Bank" ladder match at WrestleMania. His brief dalliance with The New Breed took him off the title track and tied him up in a go-nowhere feud with Elijah Burke. For a man whose only "addiction" is competition, Punk has walked blindly into several ill-advised matches and feuds and hasn't performed particularly well in important PPV matches. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: A year ago, Punk would have been the consensus pick as WWE's top young star of the future. Now he shares that designation with Montel Vontavious Porter, Ken Kennedy, and Bobby Lashley. It's time for Punk to break out. He still has lots of potential, but Punk has lost a little of his luster. **GRADE: B+**



C.M.
PUNK

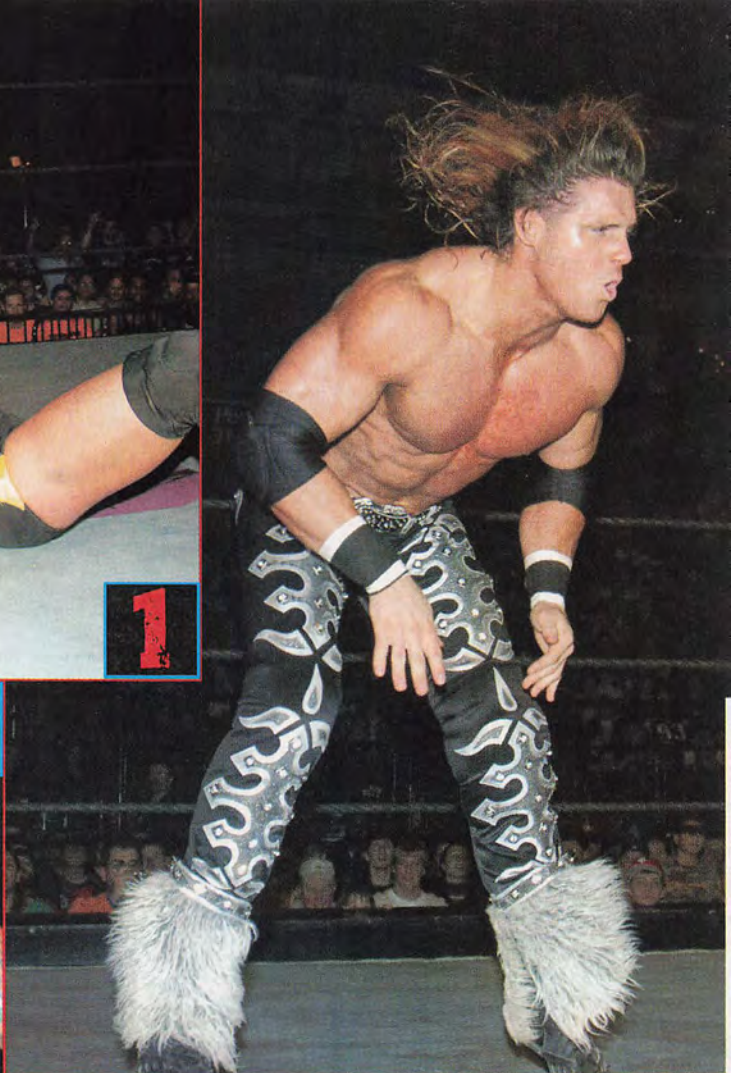




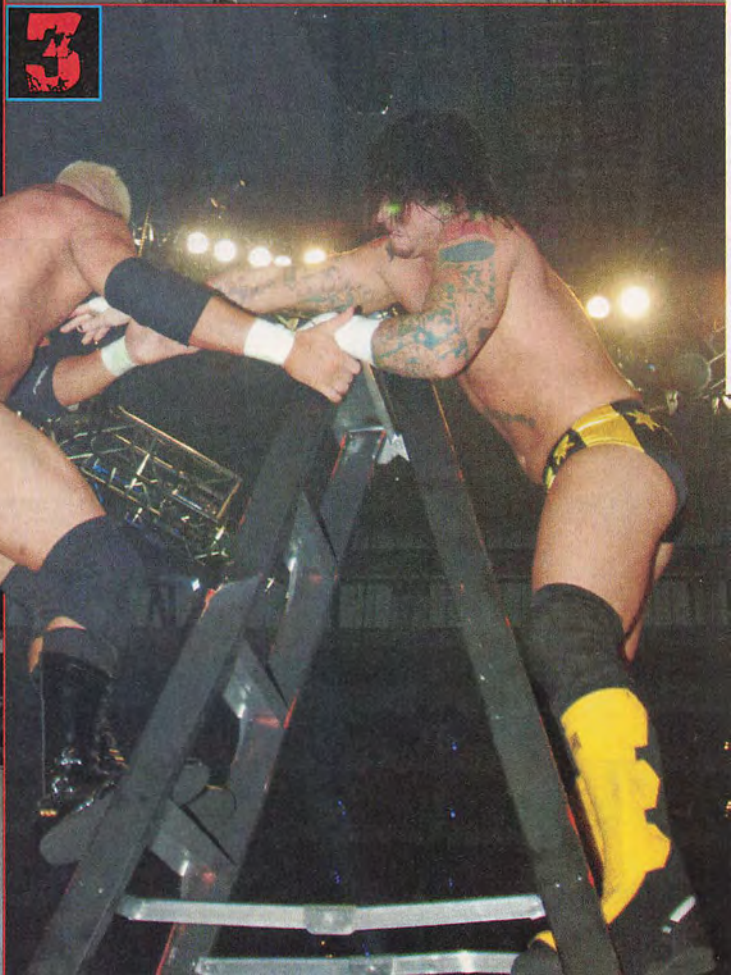
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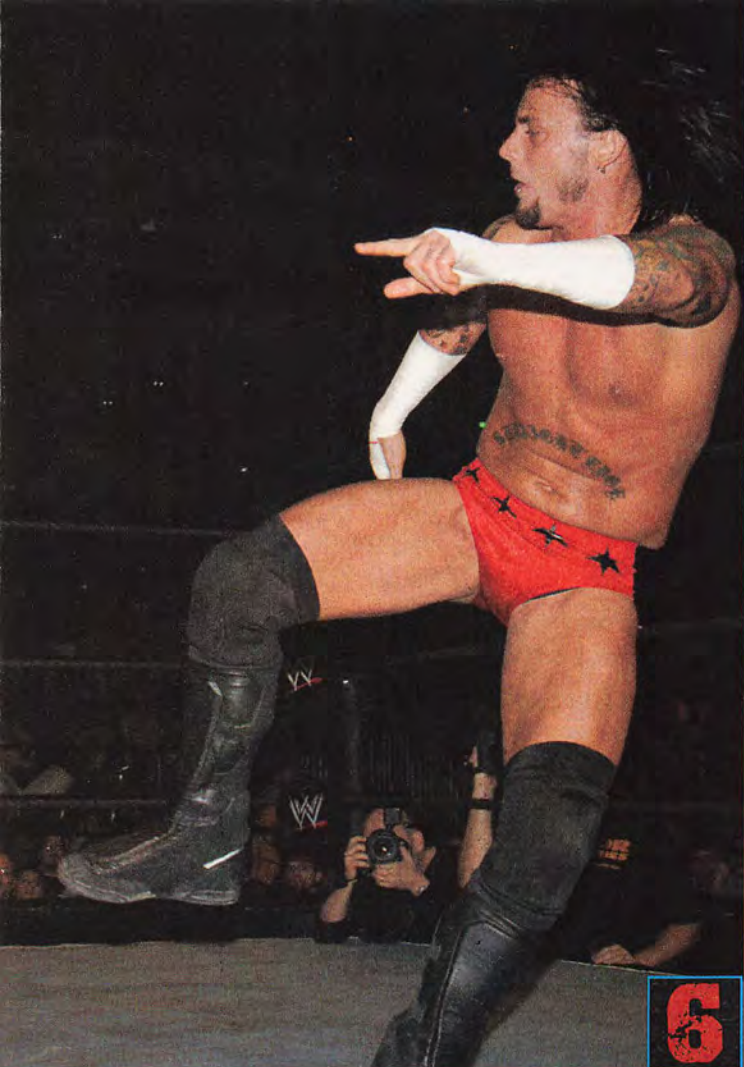


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1 It's hard to believe that C.M. Punk has been in ECW for a year. Punk got off to a strong start by dominating ECW Originals such as Justin Credible, who is about to submit to the anaconda vice.

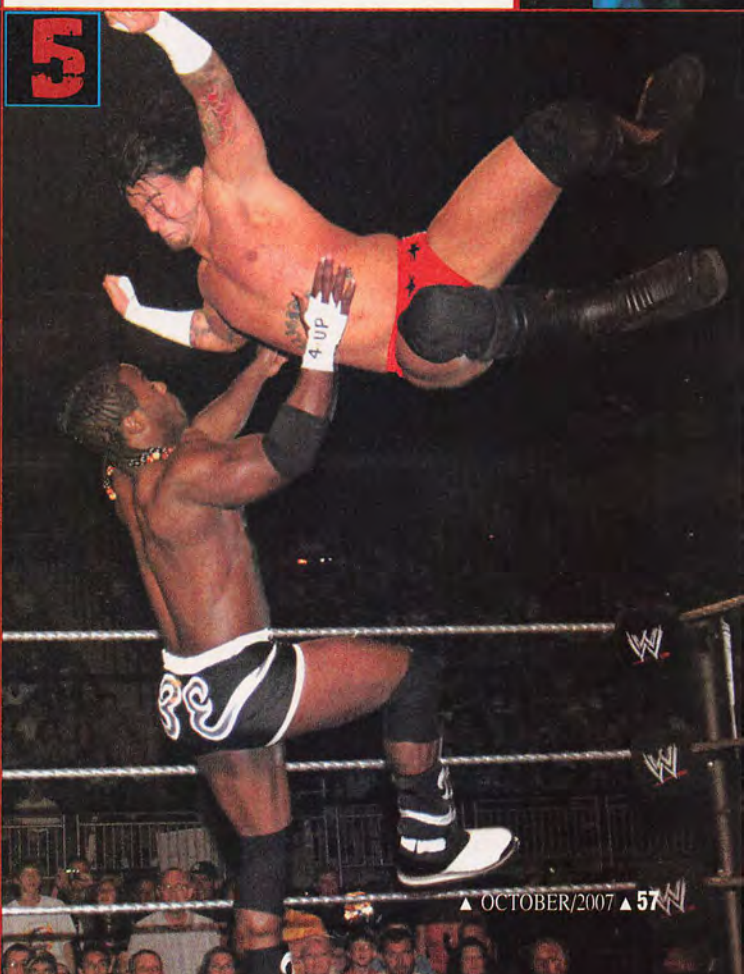
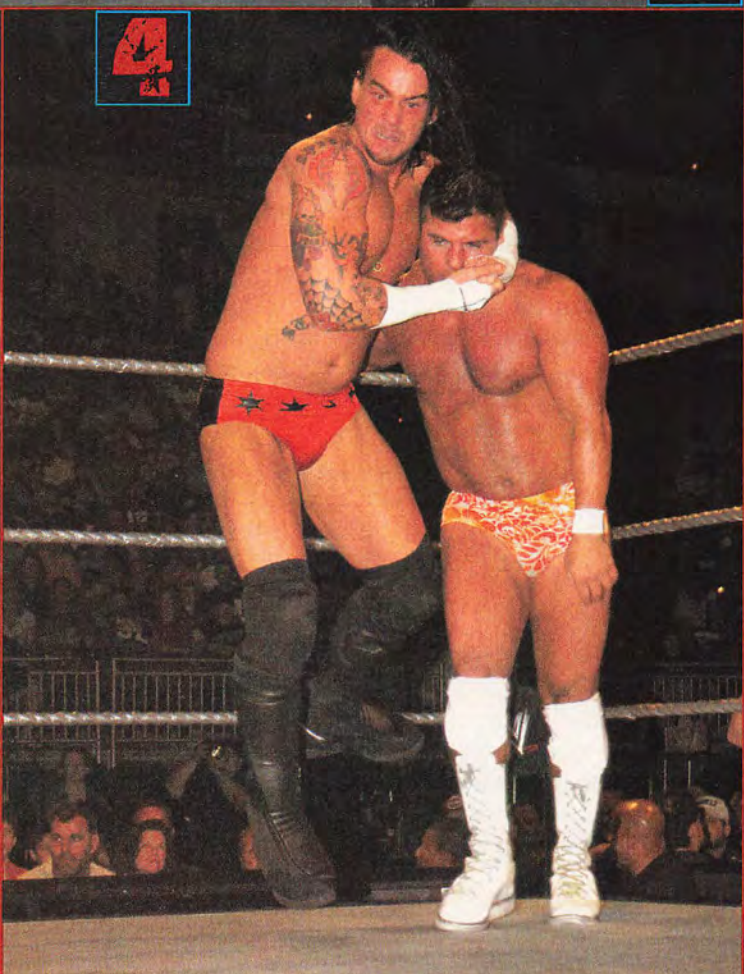
2 Punk stuns Shannon Moore with a sidekick directly to the face. Considering how Punk has dominated both larger and smaller foes in ECW, Moore should count himself lucky to be on Smackdown now.

3 Punk was a favorite to win the "Money In The Bank" match at WrestleMania 23, but Ken Kennedy turned out to be craftier, even as they battled atop the ladder. Despite his remarkable win-loss record, it seems that Punk has lost when it really counted in 2007.

4 Punk prepares to bulldog Matt Striker at One Night Stand. In the end, Punk superplexed Striker onto Elijah Burke and through a table to win the match for his team. It was a solid victory, but when is this guy going to win the ECW championship?

5 The only ECW newcomer to embody the spirit of the original ECW, Punk was not out of place when he teamed with Tommy Dreamer and The Sandman to face the New Breed at One Night Stand. At least Punk was able to flatten Burke with this flying bodypress.

6 The first clash between Punk and Johnny Nitro occurred at Survivor Series 2006 during an elimination match. Punk and Nitro couldn't have predicted that they would be feuding over the ECW title in 2007.



SAMOA JOE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Let's face the facts: The X division title should not be Samoa Joe's goal. It has been two years since the "Samoan Submission Machine" invaded TNA. From that very first appearance, people had Joe pegged as the next heavyweight champion. But here we are, two years later, and Joe—for as big and tough as he is—*still* hasn't won the World title. As of this writing, Joe has an opportunity to win the strap at Victory Road, but we're grading the past 12 months, not speculating on the future. **GRADE: C**



MARKETABILITY: Joe may be the most popular wrestler in TNA because of his stiff, smash-mouth style. In a world where most wrestlers look like they just stepped out of *Muscle & Fitness*, Joe stands out. He's more concerned about results than appearances. He exudes a quiet confidence and intensity, and that sells tickets and merchandise alike.

GRADE: A

REPERTOIRE: No one has doubted Joe's technical prowess since he first went toe-to-toe with Angle. Joe's offense is deceptively explosive. He can fire eight or nine strikes in rapid-fire succession and then deliver a spinning enzuigiri kick before his opponent even has time to fall to the mat. Joe may be the best striker in the sport today, and he is a tremendous submission wrestler. However, Angle exposed a few minor flaws in Joe's game. For all his intensity, Joe can become sloppy when he gets angry. Joe often makes only glancing contact with his running senton splash because he is too excited. He needs to keep his emotions in check to get maximum effect out of his attacks. An angry Joe may make fans chant "Joe's gonna kill you," but in truth, an angry Joe is easier to beat than a calm, even-tempered Joe. **GRADE: B+**

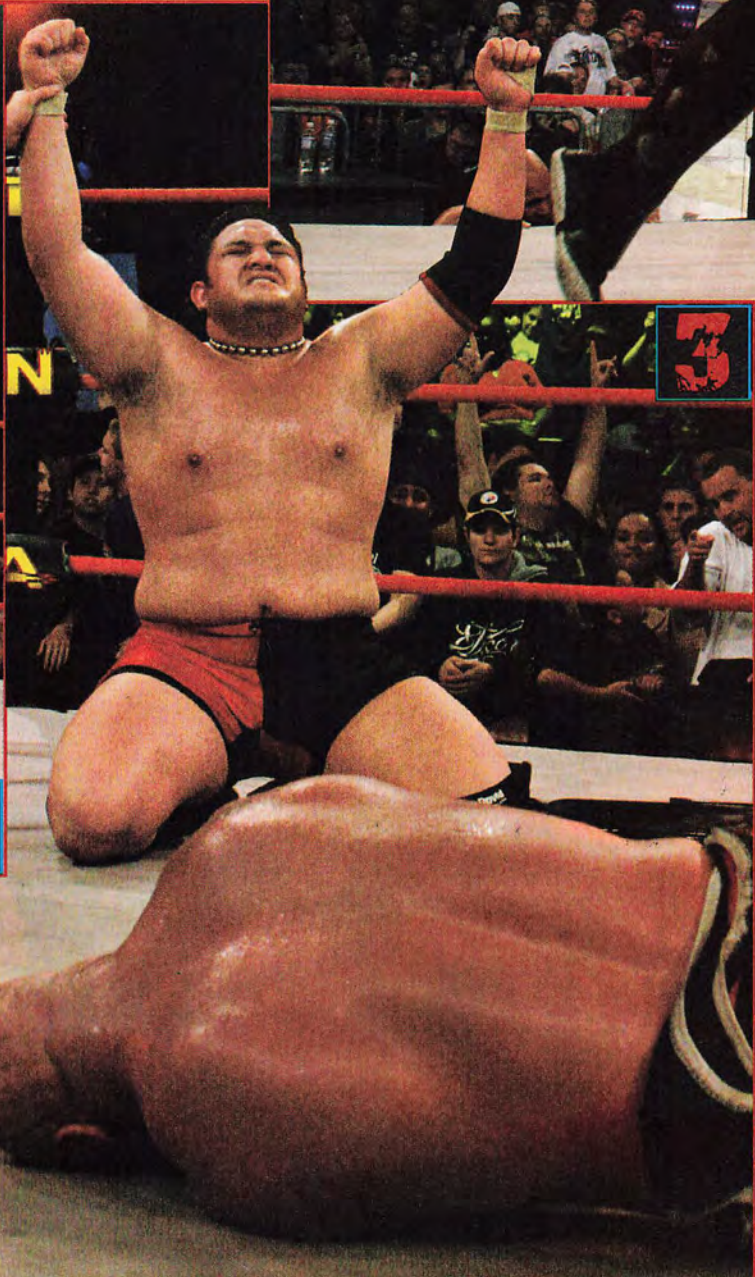
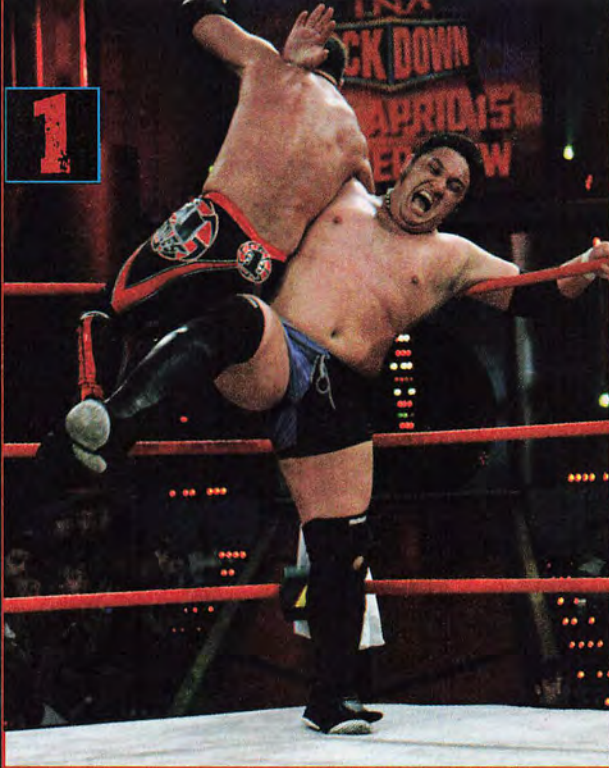
CAREER GROWTH: On one hand, Joe took a big step forward this year, wrestling memorable matches against Angle and showing he has the ability to become TNA's top star. On the other hand, the man who was poised to take over TNA a year ago now has possession of only a consolation prize, the X division title. In other words, Joe's failure to capitalize on his World title opportunities to date has robbed him of the being "something special." Among Angle, Jeff Jarrett, Christian Cage, Sting, Christopher Daniels, and Abyss, it no longer seems like such a sure thing that Joe will be the future of TNA.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Joe's grades might have dropped a bit since his straight-A report card of 2006, but he's still in a good position. With his archenemy, Angle, in possession of the World title, Joe should be completely focused on finally scoring that decisive win and claiming the championship. If he can finally score and make it to the top, he could become the most dominant champion in TNA history. **GRADE: B**

SAMOA
JOE





SAMOA JOE



1 Joe is clearly in a league apart from other X division competitors. His size and strength enable him to dominate even against X division staple A.J. Styles. Joe should focus more attention on challenging men his own size, as fans grow bored watching him defeat the same men time and again.

2 An angry Joe is a scary Joe, but a more effective Joe is more even-tempered. A.J. Styles may dread seeing Joe come at him with fury in his eyes, but Joe has been shown to lose sight of his goals when emotions get in the way.

3 When Kurt Angle unexpectedly made the leap to TNA, the Olympian immediately began a feud with the promotion's strongest force, Samoa Joe. Their series of rematches provided edge-of-your-seat grappling between the two submission masters. Joe dominated their second match, but Angle was the ultimate winner in the end.

4 At TNA's Slammiversary pay-per-view, Samoa Joe had the opportunity to finally claim the TNA World title that had eluded him since signing on with the company. While Joe brought his A-game against the likes of Christian Cage, the belt escaped his grasp once more.

5 While representing Team Angle, Joe put his foot down against Team Cage teammates such as A.J. Styles. Styles has experienced Joe's wrath in the past, but never to the degree he has since Styles' heel turn.

6 Christian Cage should have focused his efforts on recruiting Samoa Joe for Team Cage, because the last thing anyone wants is Joe on the opposing side of a battle.



UMAGA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Last year at this time, we ran a story some people considered somewhat audacious at the time, asking "Is Armando Alejandro Estrada Ruining Umaga's Career?" Considering that Umaga was riding high on an undefeated streak that was establishing him as arguably the most dominant force on the Raw brand, questioning Estrada's motives was a pretty bold step. One year later, however, it looks like our criticism was well founded. At the Royal Rumble, Estrada's interference backfired and helped cost Umaga his match against Raw World champion John Cena. Then Estrada sold out Umaga as a hired gun for Vince McMahon, further pushing the "Samoan Bulldozer" out of title contention. Umaga's flaws have been exposed, and Estrada's

manipulative management has poked a hole in the aura of invincibility Umaga created last year. He's still a dangerous force, but no longer a raging juggernaut.

GRADE: B-

MARKETABILITY: Umaga took part in the match that received more mainstream media attention than any other match this year, yet Umaga was merely a pawn in the chess match between McMahon and Donald Trump. To his credit, Umaga did not seem out of place in the spotlight. However, the fact that he was so easily overshadowed doesn't speak much about his marketability. He's firmly a part of the WWE B-list. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: Umaga is an old-fashioned brawler, much like his Samoan kinsmen, Afa and Sika. His repertoire is entirely power-based, and it suits him perfectly. Just as you can't fault a bulldozer for its inability to take hairpin turns, you can't really fault Umaga for his lack of scientific mastery. But a more developed offense wouldn't hurt. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: Though WWE doesn't go out of its way to bring attention to it, just a few short years ago, Umaga was known as Jamal, one-half of Three-Minute Warning. Though the massive Samoan team made a big impact initially, they quickly stalled out and dropped off the WWE radar. Last year, Jamal reinvented himself as Umaga. Not only did it bring him back to WWE, but it also put him in featured matches in two of the biggest PPVs of the year. That's a big step up from working scattered dates on the indy circuit. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Cena bounced Umaga out of title contention, but Umaga still has plenty of potential. A run as a fan favorite could give him a fresh start, just as it did for Kane several years ago. Umaga could also jump from Raw to either Smackdown or ECW and immediately establish himself as a title contender. Umaga has main-event credibility and would be a welcome addition to any brand. Umaga brings intrigue wherever he goes, and he has the physicality to ensure hard-hitting, intense bouts. The value of a wrestler like Umaga cannot be understated. **GRADE: B-**



UMAGA



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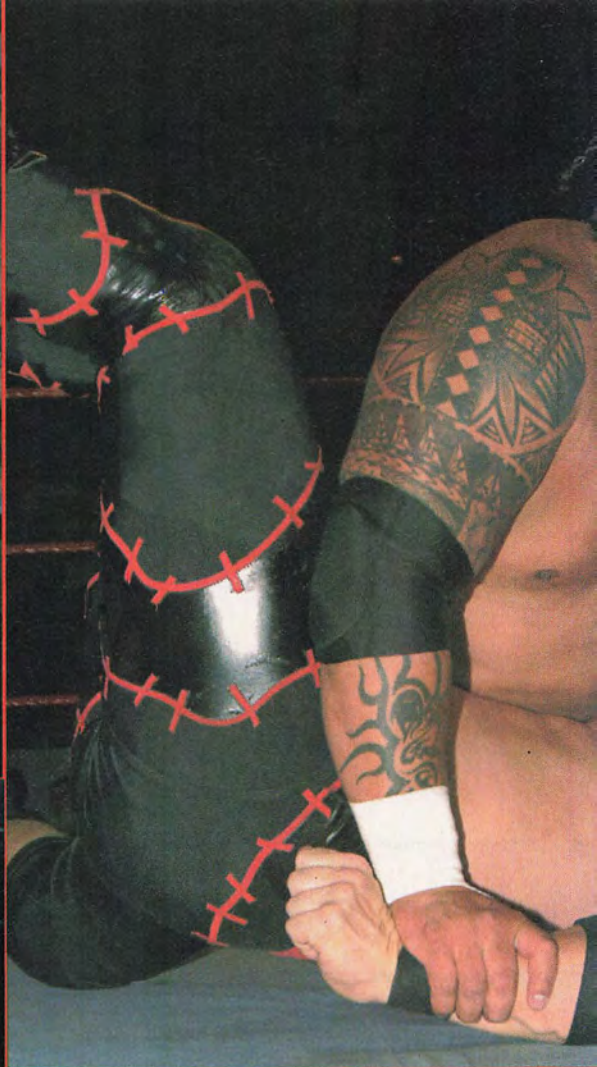
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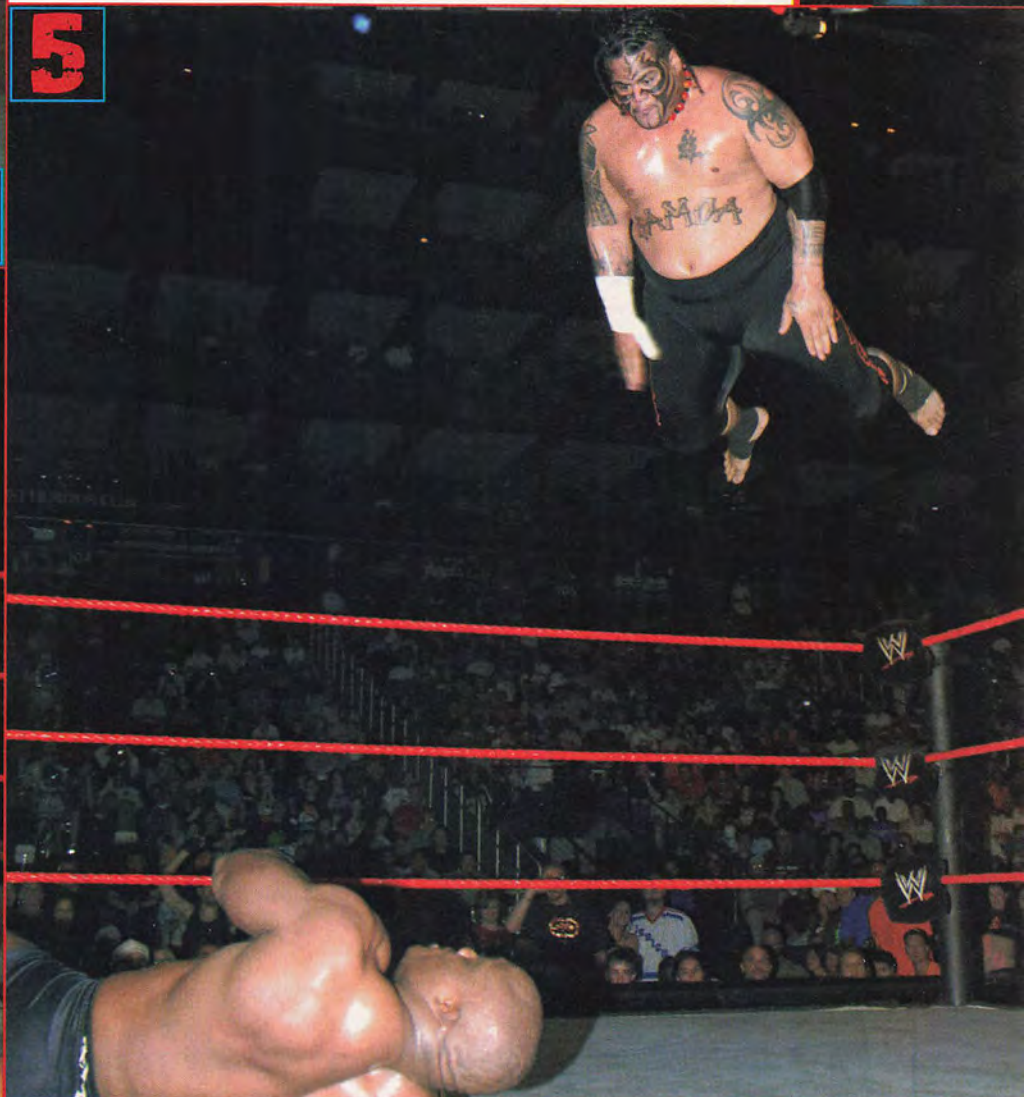


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- 1** Since manager Armando Alejandro Estrada shifted Umaga's focus from title contention toward the care of Vince McMahon, Umaga's undefeated streak was compromised for the sake of the chairman—a choice many consider unwise.
- 2** The thing about bulldozers is that they can take a pounding. One of Umaga's greatest advantages is that he can not only endure the punishment of others, but he is able to use more power and force without causing injury to himself.
- 3** Umaga was chosen to represent Vince McMahon against WWE outsider Donald Trump during their feud that culminated at WrestleMania 23. While Mr. McMahon's team lost in the end, Umaga made Trump-representative Bobby Lashley's life a living hell for weeks.
- 4** A technical move set was not what kept the island savage alive on his home turf. "The Samoan Bulldozer" relies on raw power to eliminate his obstacles, be it wild predators or Bobby Lashley.
- 5** Umaga's impressive abilities for a man his size set him apart from other WWE talent. If he could learn to talk for himself and ditch the grunts and snarls, we would see the Samoan elevate to true superstar status.
- 6** We all know Umaga as the bloodthirsty savage bad guy, but perhaps he will consider taking a lesson from Kane. As a fan favorite, Umaga could reinvigorate his persona like the "Big Red Machine" did a few years back.



UMAGA

ABYSS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: In our 2005 Report Card assessment of Abyss, we gave Abyss credit for being a consistent title contender. "Abyss has succeeded in becoming a world-class competitor," we wrote. "The title should follow eventually." Well, it took another 18 months, but Abyss finally delivered on that prophecy, improbably winning the NWA World title via a DQ decision over Sting. Abyss' reign was brief, but it represented a major turning point in the monster's career. For once, Abyss actually came out on top in a title match, as unconventional as it might have been. He was able to channel his rage into a focused effort. Perhaps, even more importantly, he got out from under the influence of James Mitchell. Now that Mitchell is no longer tormenting him about his time in prison and his father's death, Abyss can finally be his own man. That has opened a world of opportunity for him. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: We already recapped what we said about Abyss in 2005. How about this little gem from 2006? "Potentially, Abyss could be one of TNA's most marketable wrestlers. But while Mitchell may help Abyss in the ring, he doesn't help in the marketability department ... If Abyss were to dump his manager and play to the crowd just a little, Abyss T-shirts and replica masks would be a goldmine." We stand by that assessment. When Abyss hits the ring, the violence quotient goes up to a new level and that excites the fans, and that is marketable. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Abyss might want to consider ditching the mask, or at least getting a new one that allows for better peripheral vision. Between the mask and his hair obstructing his vision, Abyss often misjudges where his opponents are, leaving him open to sneak attacks or low blows. He often telegraphs a back bodydrop attempt and takes a knee in the face as a result. And when he brings a bag of tacks or shattered glass into the ring, there's still a 75-percent chance that he'll be the one falling into it instead of his opponent. His black-hole slam and sit-out backbreaker are extremely effective, but he needs improvements in terms of finesse and ring awareness. **GRADE: C+**

CAREER GROWTH: Getting rid of Mitchell was a good move, but it was also dangerous. Between Mitchell and Christian Cage's band of thugs, Abyss has a world of enemies. Sting has helped Abyss develop as a man, but will Sting be there to prevent Abyss from being badly beaten and bloodied in the coming months? If not, Abyss may come to regret going his own way. **GRADE: B+**

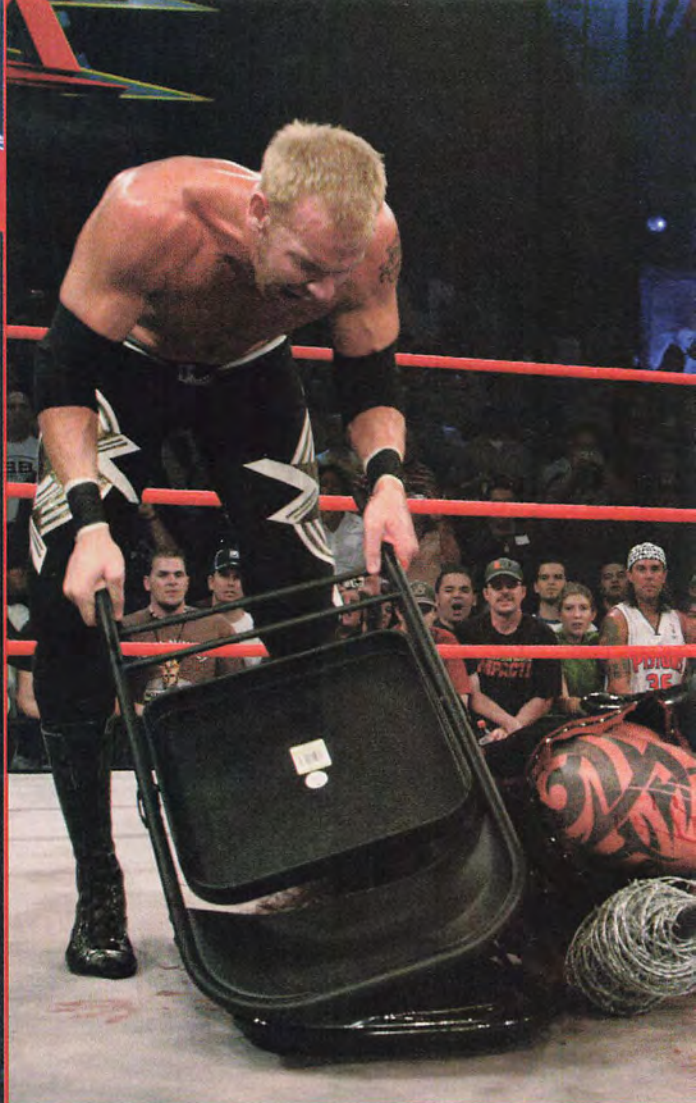
OVERALL VALUE: Abyss is the most hardcore competitor in TNA and can always be counted upon to deliver one of the most intense bouts of the night. The X division provides the sizzle of TNA; Abyss provides the steak. Frequently under-appreciated, he's one of the most reliable, gutsy, and loyal guys on the TNA roster. **GRADE: B+**



ABYSS



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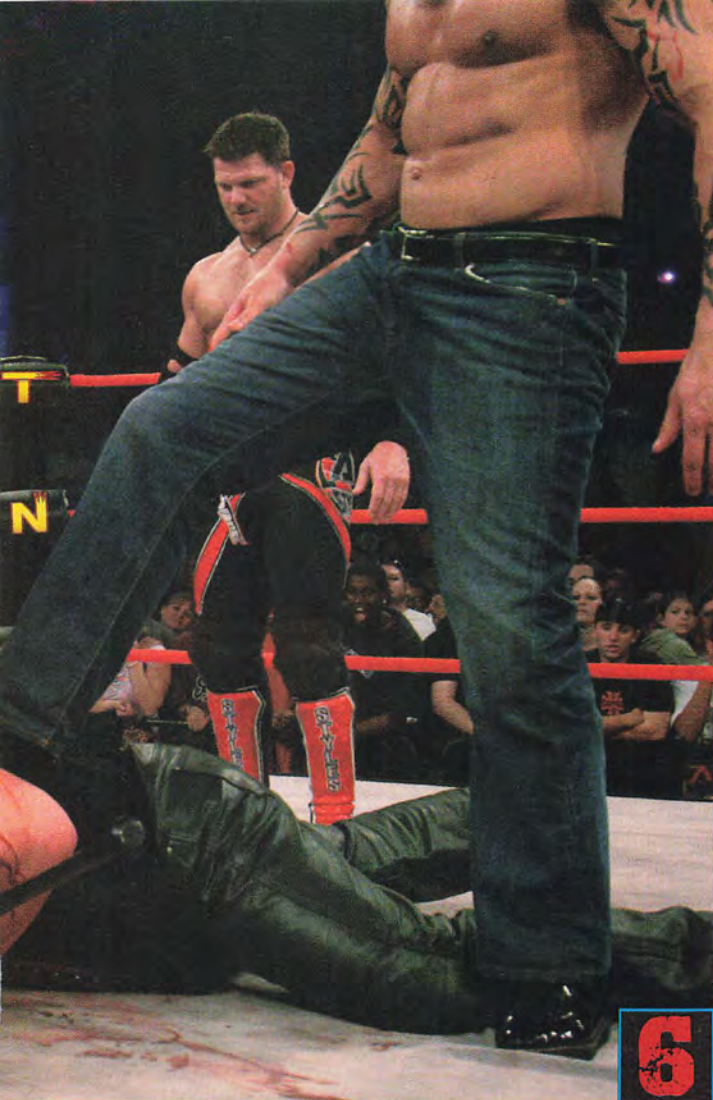


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1 Ever the forgiving fellow, Sting still tries to make Abyss see the light. Inspiringly, Sting placed greater value on redeeming Abyss' soul than regaining the NWA World championship.

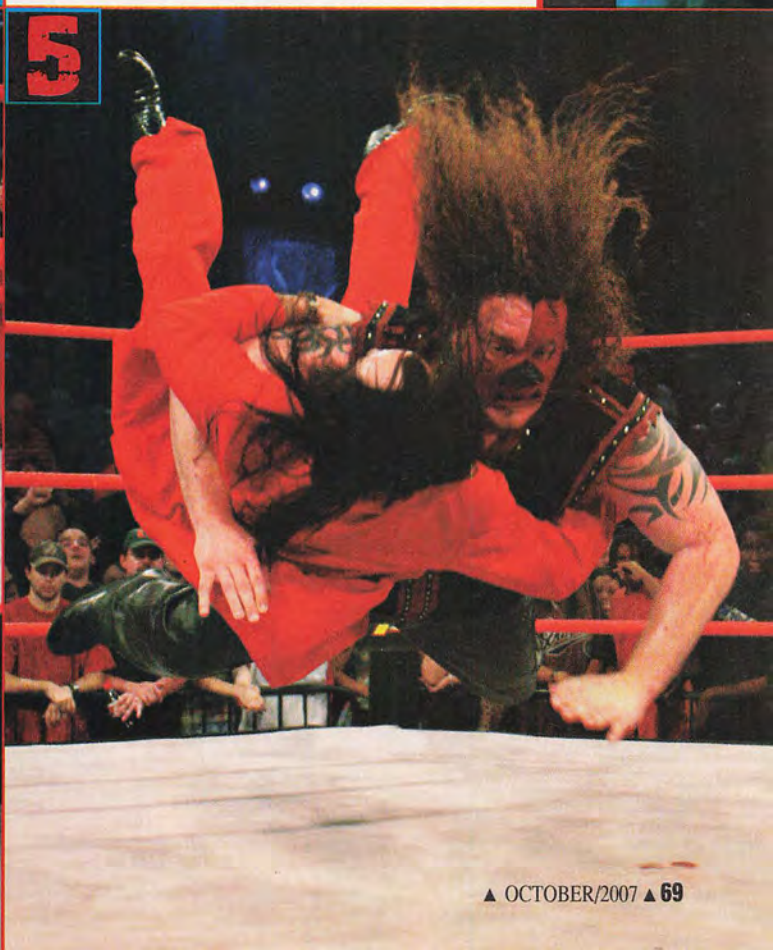
2 Abyss seems to be going for an Olympic slam against Kurt Angle, but he actually planted the Pittsburgh native with a Samoan drop. Considering that Abyss does have some basic wrestling knowledge, it's hard to dismiss him as just a monster.

3 Twisting Sting's head with all his might, Abyss was—in a sense—fighting his own personal demons when he faced Sting over the past year. By the end of 2006, Abyss was the NWA World champion—at Sting's expense.

4 "The Man-Monster" goes all out against "The Stinger," even dropping the icon on thumbtacks he had poured across the ring. With Mitchell in his corner, Abyss was capable of anything.

5 Abyss finally took his long-held frustrations out on James Mitchell, planting him with a Rock bottom. Although Abyss has fired his evil manager, it's still hard to trust someone as unpredictable as "The Man-Monster."

6 Christian Cage, Scott Steiner, and A.J. Styles attack Abyss, blaming him for their loss to Team Angle at Lockdown. For some reason, bullies enjoy making this man's life miserable.



CHRISTIAN CAGE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: For all the talk about Sting, Kurt Angle, and Samoa Joe being the future of TNA, it was Christian Cage who distinguished himself as the company's top villain over the past year. The two-time NWA champion may be the most underrated main-event talent in wrestling today, but he takes full advantage of being underrated. While people pay attention to Angle and Joe, Cage simply goes about finding ways to steal tainted victories from the jaws of defeat and continue his reign as the dirtiest player in TNA.

GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: Cage has a quick sense of humor and a great sense of comic timing and delivery. He also has a way of giving himself new nicknames that always seem to find their way onto T-shirts. After all, he is "Captain Charisma," right? But Christian still suffers from the stigma of being a perennial WWE mid-carder. Christian never quite broke through to the main-event

level the way his former partner, Edge, did, until after he debuted in TNA. There's still a perception among some that Christian is just a mid-card talent and that his success in TNA is more an indictment of that company's quality of opposition than an affirmation of Cage's skill. We don't agree with that point of view, but it is out there.

GRADE: B

REPERTOIRE: Cage's style is great because he does so many little things so well, you hardly notice he's doing it. Few wrestlers have the body awareness and coordination to shift their weight and counter as many moves as Cage does. How many times has he slipped out of a suplex attempt or avoided a chokeslam simply by shifting his hips at the ideal moment and escaping the move? Cage also has tremendous reflexes and can change the course of a match by executing a precision drop toehold that slams his blitzing opponent's head into the mat. Cage knows when it's time to rake the eyes, when it's time to wrestle, when it's time to play possum, and when it's time to shine with his unprettier or frog splash. There's a reason Cage always seems to win.

GRADE: A

CAREER GROWTH: Jumping to TNA was the riskiest move Cage ever made, and it opened a new door for his career. Cage is to TNA today what Roddy Piper was to the WWF in 1985. He's the man fans love to hate, which is much better than being left off the card in WWE.

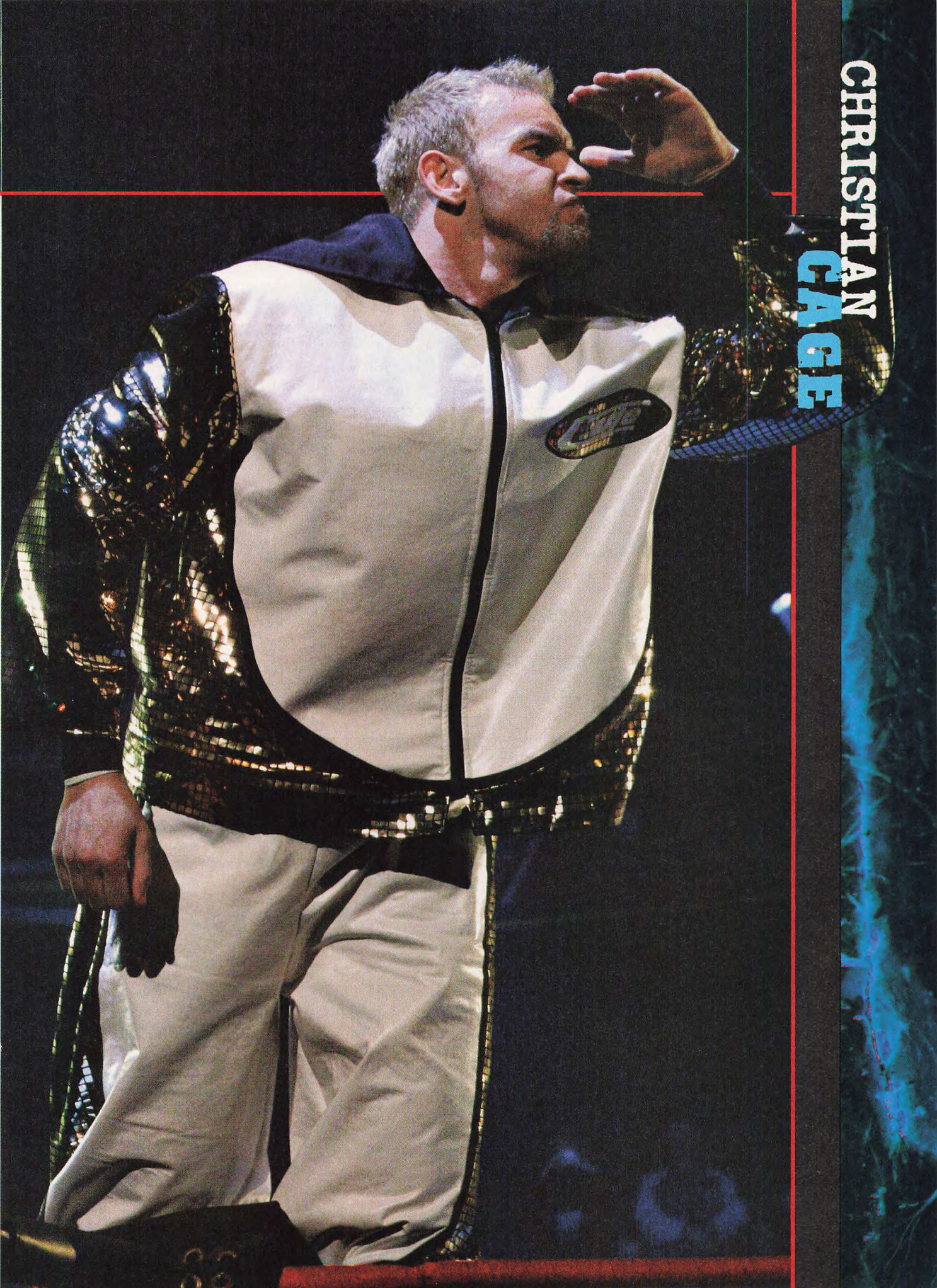
GRADE: A

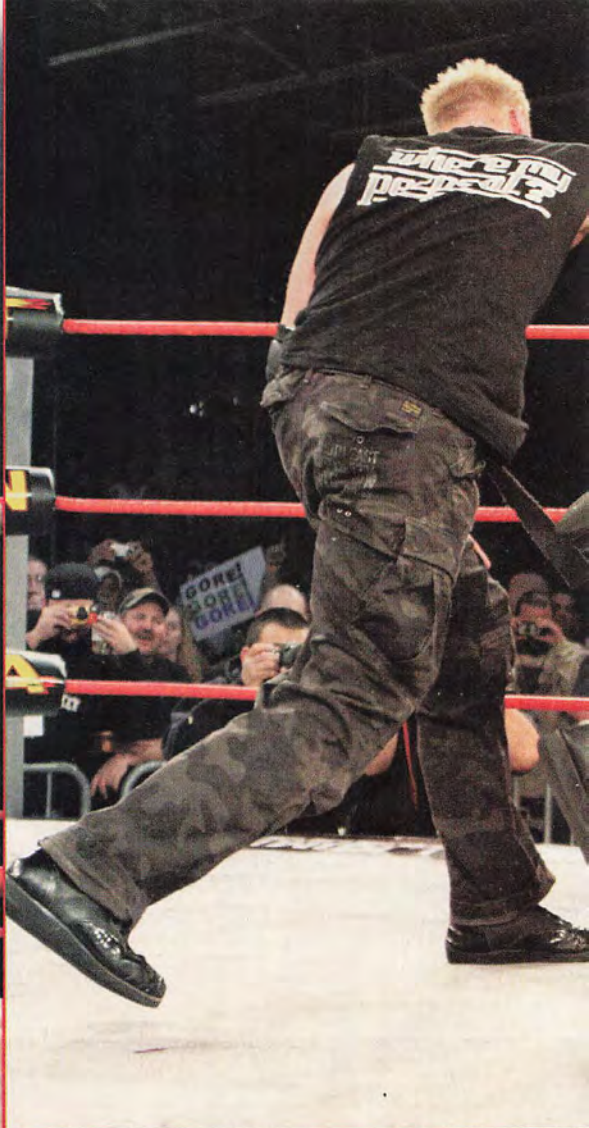
OVERALL VALUE: Cage may not have the marquee name of Angle or Sting, but he is a great talker and a great wrestler. While Joe glowers and Sting preaches, Cage entertains. He comes across as hip, funny, and a world-class jerk, but in the best of ways. Cage is the kind of guy who can attract new fans with his interviews and retain them with his matches. He was a tremendous acquisition by TNA.

GRADE: B+



CHRISTIAN
CAGE





1

2



CHRISTIAN CAGE



1 Cage lets loose with a stinger splash during the "King Of The Mountain" match for the TNA World title at Slammiversary. Because Cage does so much back pedaling, opponents tend to underestimate his aerial abilities.

2 Cage and A.J. Styles weren't always the best of friends. Here, Cage tries to rearrange Styles' face with his bare hands. They probably aren't friends now, either, just convenient allies.

3 The "Instant Classic" doesn't hesitate to trash-talk when Kurt Angle is flat on the canvas. That is when Cage is at his bravest. But even thugs like Travis Tomko and Scott Steiner often ran out of patience with the Toronto native.

4 Letting out a primal scream, Cage chokes Sting during an NWA World title match. Cage was so determined to win the gold from Sting that he almost went nuts. Like Jeff Jarrett in the past, Cage is obsessed with being champion.

5 During yet another showdown, a "Six Sides Of Steel" match, Cage chops his former friend, Rhino, in the chest. Although Cage seemed to take most of the punishment in these brutal encounters, his arm was raised in victory most of the time.

6 Cage throws Rhino into a table during their infamous "Eight-Mile Street-fight." Ordinarily, big brawling types would have the advantage in no-holds-barred brawls, but matches with no rules simply help the cagey Cage get more creative.



BACK ISSUES OF the Wrestler

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June 1981: Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

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June 1982: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship. Also: Piper-Armstrong, Hussein Arab, Bruno Sammartino, Adonis & Ventura, Butch Reed.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Roddy Piper, Gagne & Brunzell, Putski & Snuka, Brian Blair.

Dec. 1982: Morales vs. Snuka: Does Pedro Deserve To Be Intercontinental Champion? Also: Bob Orton Jr., Kamala, Rich & Rhodes, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase, JVD-Backwinkel, Oliver Humperdink.

Feb. 1983: Exclusive Coverage: Nick Backwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz. Also: Backlund-Graham, Rich-Sawyer, Barry Windham, Martel & Garea, McDaniel & Piper, Kamala.

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Sept. 1983: Nick Backwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Briscoes, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

Nov. 1983: Target—Harley Race! Can Dusty Rhodes Fulfill His American Dream A Third Time? Also: Rick Rude, Rotundo-Kabuki, Gagne & Brunzell, Tito Santana, Von Erichs-Freebirds.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

July 1984: Tommy Rich Is Back! And He Owes It All To The Fans. Also: Valiant-Rhodes, Ric Flair, Mike Von Erich, Billy Jack.

Aug. 1984: Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

Nov. 1984: The \$50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

Dec. 1984: The Title Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

Jan. 1985: Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Lauger, Koloffs & Kernodle, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGehee.

Feb. 1985: Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-

Shepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

April 1985: Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich, & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kid, tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaisie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

June 1985: Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Backwinkel, Lex Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Ahmed, Nick Backwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

June 1987: The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Am's: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Backwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

July 1987: Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

Sept. 1987: Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Backwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

Oct. 1988: The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title

Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snakel!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

April 1989: Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

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Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

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Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This

Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Ann Anderson.

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Feb. 1997: Wrestling's Top Stars: What 1997 Has In Store For Them! Also: Michaels-Hart, Pit Bull I, Rey Mysterio Jr., Kevin Nash.

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Rank In 10 Crucial Categories. Also: Big Show, Tank Abbott, Too Cool, Rhodes-Dreamer, Jeff Jarrett.

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what's ahead in '03.

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☐ FEB 85	☐ MAR 89	☐ FEB 92	☐ WIN 95	☐ MAR 99	☐ NOV 01	
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RIC FLAIR

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Ric Flair says it a lot: Space Mountain might be the oldest ride in the park, but it's still got the longest line. The "Nature Boy" won his first world championship while John Cena was still in diapers, but Flair is still one of the most beloved and respected competitors in the sport. After years of living and dying for title belts, Flair seems to relish his role on the mid-card. He's wrestling for the pure love of the sport (okay, for money, too) and is sharing his experience with younger wrestlers. He took Carlito under his wing, and then beat Carlito when the frustrated student turned against his teacher. Flair is ready to give back to wrestling, and he's still good enough to make sure no one takes advantage of him. He's in a good place on the mid-card ... but we'd still like to see him win just one more world title before he hangs up the robe for good. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Take a plain T-shirt. Write "Whooo!" on the front. Price it at \$25 and put it on a merchandise table. It will sell. That's how marketable Flair is. Just DVD anthologies of his career alone are worth a mint! **GRADE: A+**

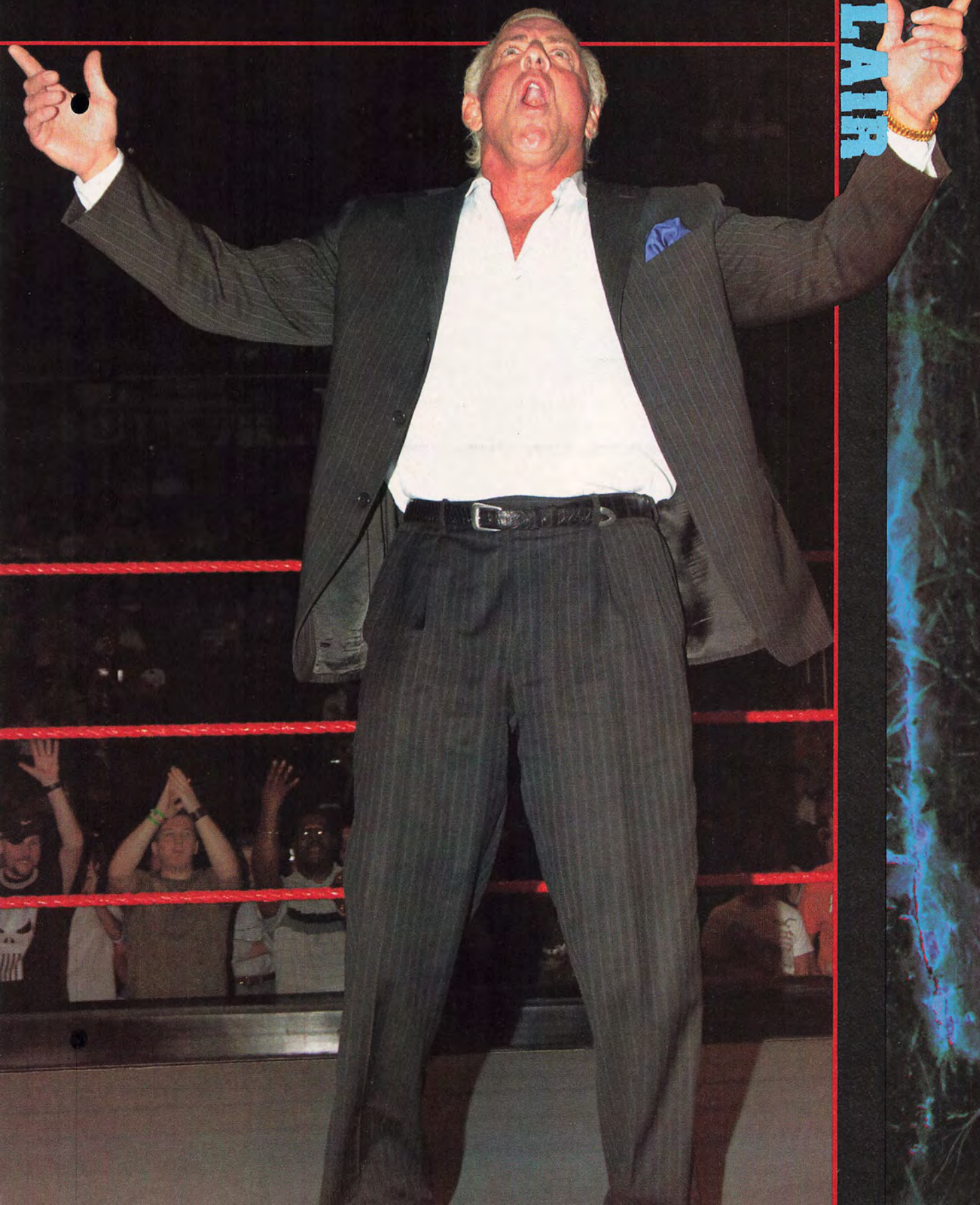
REPERTOIRE: Honestly, Flair is not the wrestler he was 20 years ago. He's not the wrestler he was 10 years ago. Age and three decades of bumps take their toll. But, while Flair has slowed down a step or two and his physique isn't what it used to be, he's still holding his own against men half his age. Take his World title match against Edge at the June 12 taping of Smackdown, for example. Flair may not be as good as he used to be, but he's still a master who has forgotten more about wrestling than most competitors will ever learn. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Being sent from Raw to Smackdown courtesy of the 2007 draft can help reinvigorate Flair's career. He had grown stagnant on Raw. He and Carlito didn't even get a spot on the main WrestleMania card (they competed in a dark match). Moving to Smackdown will give him an opportunity to interact with former protégé Batista, as well as Edge, The Undertaker, and MVP. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Flair wasn't a part of WrestleMania this year, and his absence was largely unnoticed. While still a major player in WWE, Flair is not an essential part of the roster these days. However, a win over Ric Flair still gives credibility to a young wrestler. Flair can still impart his wisdom to younger competitors, and he can still cut the most passionate and intense promos in the game. Flair's contribution inside the ring is less than it used to be. Flair's contribution outside the ring is invaluable. **GRADE: B+**



RIC
FLAIR





RIC FLAIR



1 The figure-four is still Flair's finisher of choice. Even the "Masterpiece" knows the end is near once Flair has his classic move locked in place.

2 Still up to his old tricks, Flair will take a win any way he can. Wouldn't you if you were battling against Spirit Squad members half your age?

3 Ric Flair is still winning titles, even at age 58. "The Nature Boy" carried the Raw World tag team title in November 2006 along with another legend, 53-year-old "Rowdy" Roddy Piper.

4 Kenny Dykstra wanted nothing more than to first emulate and then defeat his idol, but Flair made it known that there was only room for one "Nature Boy" in the squared circle.

5 His move set might be mostly chops at this point, but Flair still incites cheers and "Whooo's!" from the crowd. He's still one of WWE's most marketable stars.

6 With age comes wisdom. Carlito valued Flair's advice for a while, but soon he turned against his mentor, and that was when Flair's experience was most useful. "Naitch" beat the young star, teaching him the greatest lesson of all: respect.



MATT & JEFF HARDY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: With apologies to Mr. Mark Twain, it looks like all those reports of Jeff Hardy's demise were greatly exaggerated. When Hardy was released from TNA after missing a 2005 pay-per-view and a couple of *Impact* tapings, a lot of people figured Jeff was just burnt out on wrestling. Even before he vanished from TNA, his behavior seemed odd, like he just wasn't quite focused. Matt, meanwhile, was languishing on Smackdown, still smarting from coming out on the losing end of his feud with Edge. Well, it looks as if Jeff has found his passion again, and his presence back in

WWE has been a real spark for Matt. Jeff regained the Intercontinental title, and the reunited Hardys became Raw's top tag team for the first half of 2007. The past six months might have been the best of the brothers' careers. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: The WWE Store website is awash in Hardys merchandise, from "I Will Not Die" T-shirts to logo pendants (the fourth best-selling piece of merchandise on wwe.com) to a cool-looking logo T-shirt. The Hardys have a massive following and may be the most marketable tag team of the past decade. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Matt and Jeff have been wrestling as a team since they were toddlers. No team in the business has the fluid chemistry and foot speed The Hardys display, which is obviously their biggest strength. While Jeff tends to get more attention than Matt because of his daredevil attacks and swanton leaps, Matt is extremely underrated in terms of ability to absorb punishment, resilience, and counter-wrestling. Jeff continues to get in trouble every once in a while with a poorly timed high-risk move, but the brothers nicely complement one another's strengths and cover one another's weaknesses. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: The critical question is whether The Hardys' reunion was permanent or just a brief fling. Matt continues to do double-duty, frequently competing with Jeff on Raw and as a singles competitor on Smackdown. Jeff still wants his I-C title back. If the brothers stay together, they can remain a dominant force in the tag team ranks and—with Cade and Murdoch as well as London and Kendrick—could usher in an exciting era in tag team wrestling on Raw. If they separate once again, we expect them to fall back into their old pattern of underachieving. **GRADE: B**

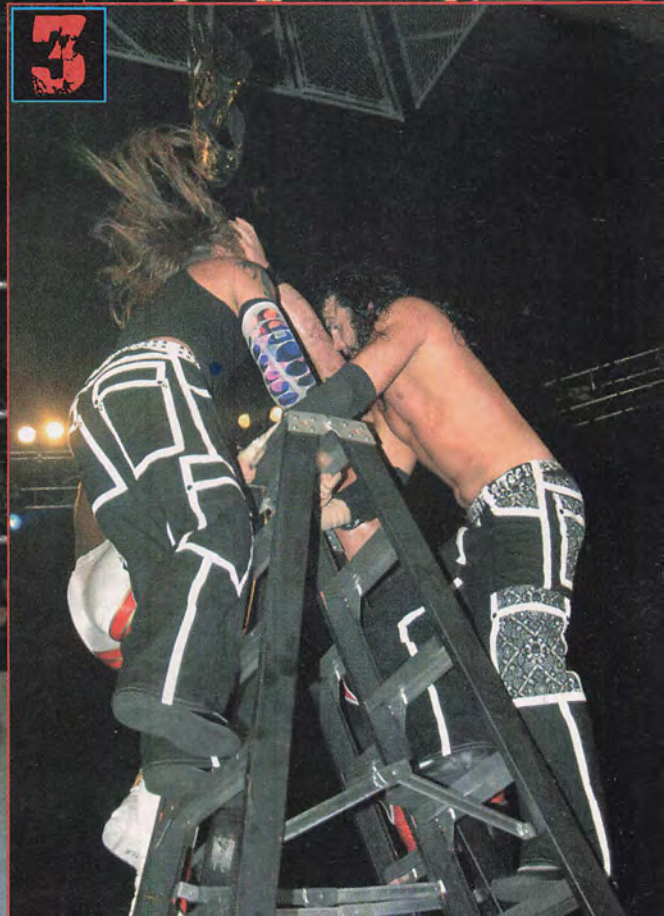
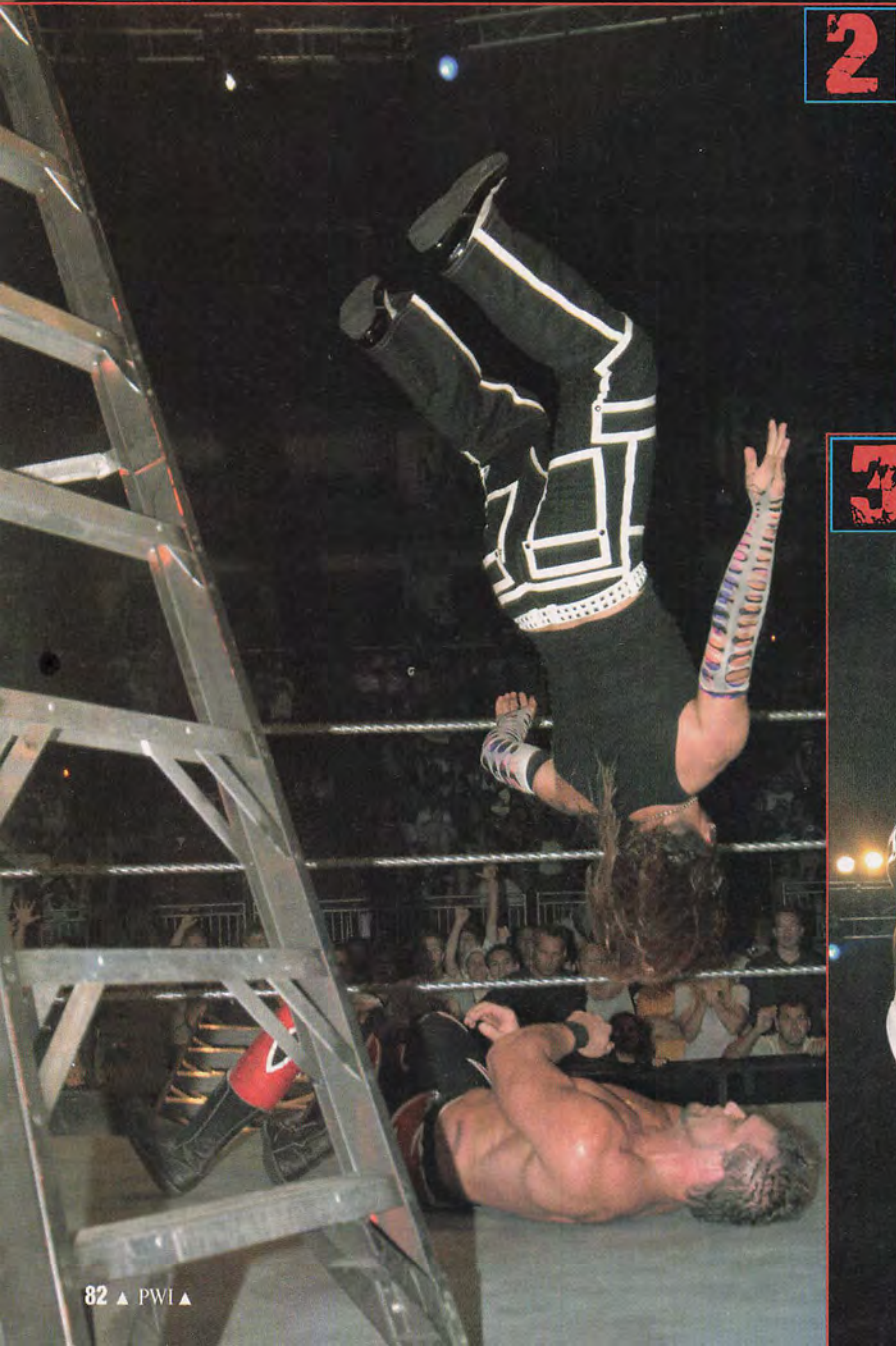
OVERALL VALUE: The Hardys are better off as a team than they are as singles wrestlers. We mean no disrespect to either Matt or Jeff by saying that; it's just that when either brother faces a larger opponent in a singles match, he usually loses. Sometimes they have more guts than common sense and frequently allow themselves to get caught up in the sort of fistfights that don't favor their style. As a team, they can dominate the pace of a match and can excel. As singles wrestlers, they're always cast as underdogs. **GRADE: B+**



MATT & JEFF

HARDY





MATT & JEFF HARDY



6

1 Although they were technically competing against each other, Matt couldn't help but root for Jeff when he leaped onto Edge, sending both of them crashing through a table, during the "Money in The Bank" ladder match at WrestleMania 23.

2 Jeff leaps off the ladder with a swanton bomb that knocks the wind out of Charlie Haas during a match pitting the Raw World tag team champions against Haas and his partner, Shelton Benjamin, at One Night Stand. The younger Hardy has been sensational this year.

3 The Hardys seemed unstoppable when they defeated The World's Greatest Tag Team at One Night Stand. Benjamin and Haas should have known they could never beat Matt and Jeff in a ladder match.

4 Jeff Hardy proved his naysayers wrong. We were all guilty of rolling our eyes when WWE re-signed the younger Hardy brother, but we have to admit he is better than ever since his return. After all, he did dominate Johnny Nitro in a feud over the Intercontinental title.

5 Matt heaves the much larger Trevor Murdoch over with a back bodydrop. Both Matt and Jeff had lost singles matches to Murdoch and Lance Cade in recent months. But it still came as a surprise when the brothers lost the belts to Cade and Murdoch on June 4.

6 Undeniably, the brothers are better together than they are apart. While each Hardy still wrestles singles matches on their respective brands, Raw and Smackdown, they have enjoyed their greatest success as a tag team on Raw.



5

4

BOBBY LASHLEY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Bobby Lashley has been the fastest-rising star in the sport over the past 10 months. His career took off when he jumped to ECW and managed to beat The Big Show for the ECW title at December to Dismember. Just a couple of months later, Lashley was in the midst of a prominent feud with the WWE chairman himself—a spot at the top of the card usually reserved for stars such as Steve Austin and DX. It's obvious that WWE Creative sees Lashley as the com-

pany's next top star, and we may be seeing the build to Lashley vs. Cena at next year's WrestleMania. He's come a long way since struggling in opening matches against Finlay on Smackdown. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: The first hint that Lashley isn't quite at the superstar level came when Donald Trump had trouble remembering Lashley's name in the weeks before 'Mania. Lashley *looks* like a star, but just doesn't come across that way yet. Lashley is so naturally laid back that even when Vince McMahon stripped him of the ECW title upon his draft to Raw, he seemed non-plussed. Intensity sells more tickets and merchandise than an impressive physique. Lashley has star potential, but he desperately needs to work harder at conveying emotion and building interest in his matches. A good catchphrase or two would help him, too. **GRADE: B-**

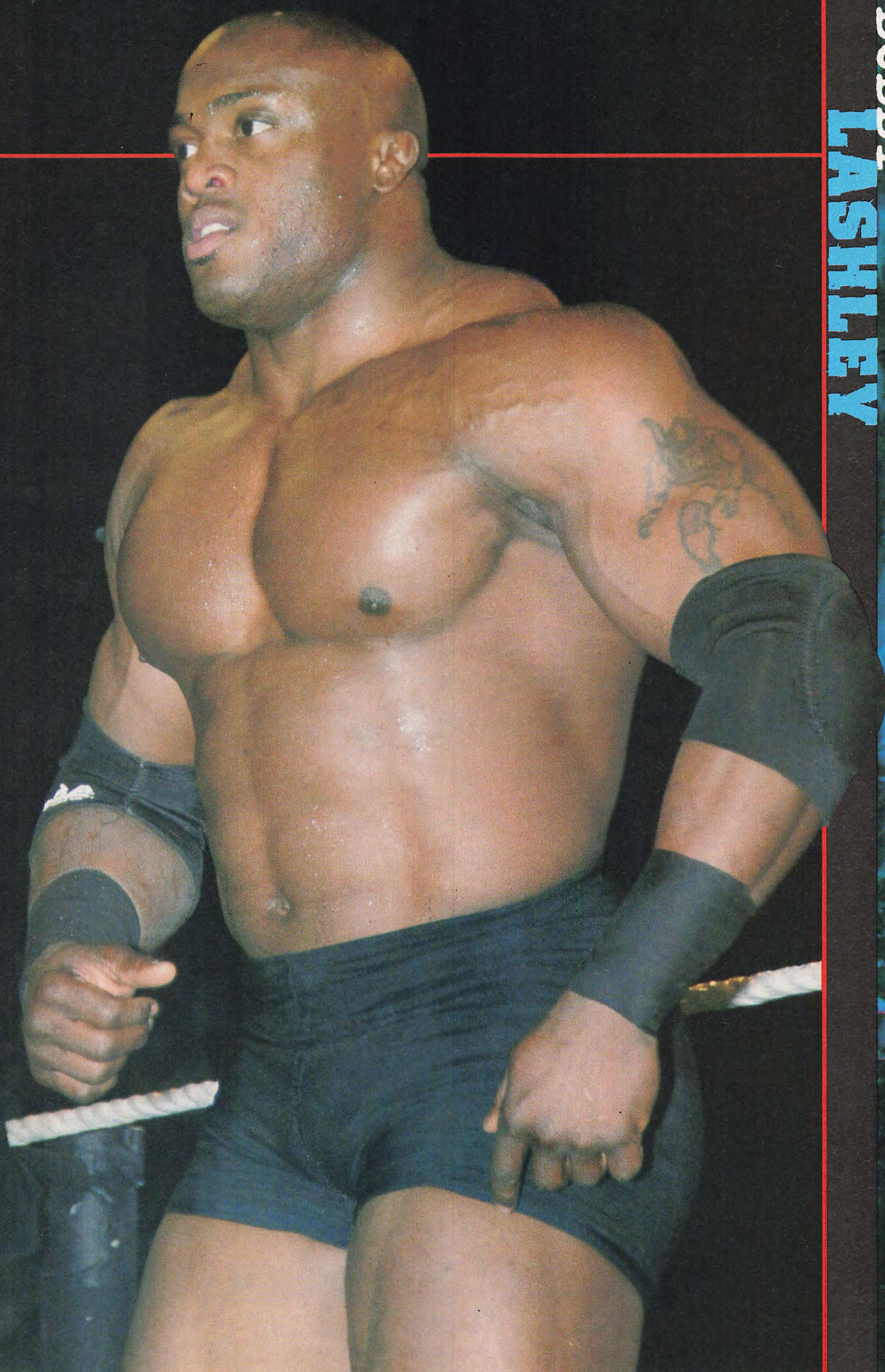
REPERTOIRE: You wouldn't think it from watching most of his matches, but Lashley has an extensive amateur wrestling background. Obviously, with his power, there's no need for him to spend a lot of time fine-tuning his takedowns and leg rides when he can just flatten most opponents with a shoulderblock or big slam. But it's a shame that Lashley is willing to let his grappling skills atrophy and limit himself to a power-based attack. There will come a time when he faces stronger men or scientific wrestlers cagey enough to avoid tests of strength. Re-discovering those amateur roots might give him an edge against top-level opponents. **GRADE: B-**

CAREER GROWTH: Lashley won one of the most talked-about matches in WrestleMania history. Unfortunately, no one was talking about *him*. Lashley wrestled a good match, but—with the world watching—he didn't have the breakthrough he badly needed. However, when Lashley was drafted to Raw, it was widely considered to be the most meaningful switch of the draft. He's the newest star on WWE's biggest stage, and he's only going to get better. **GRADE: A+**

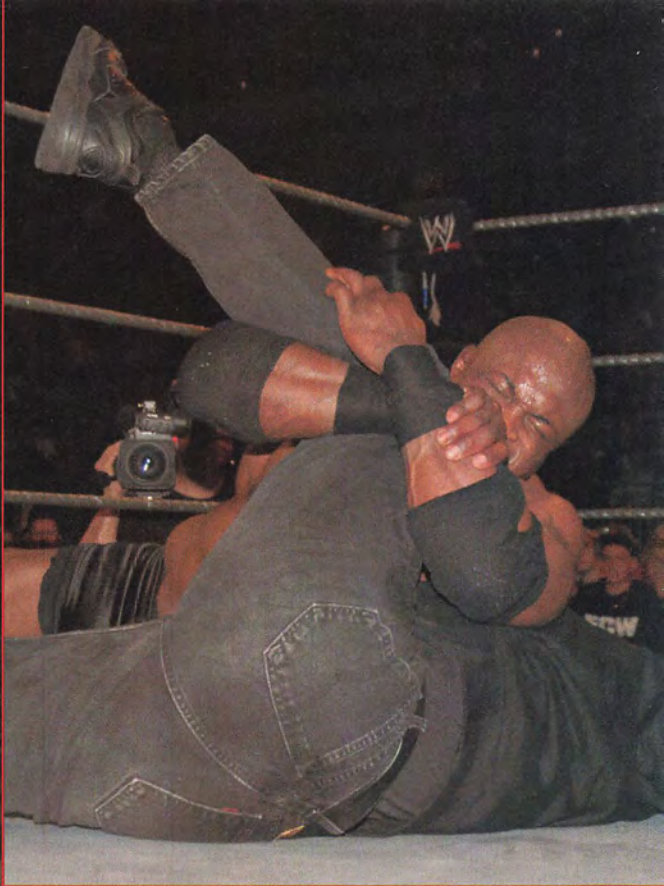
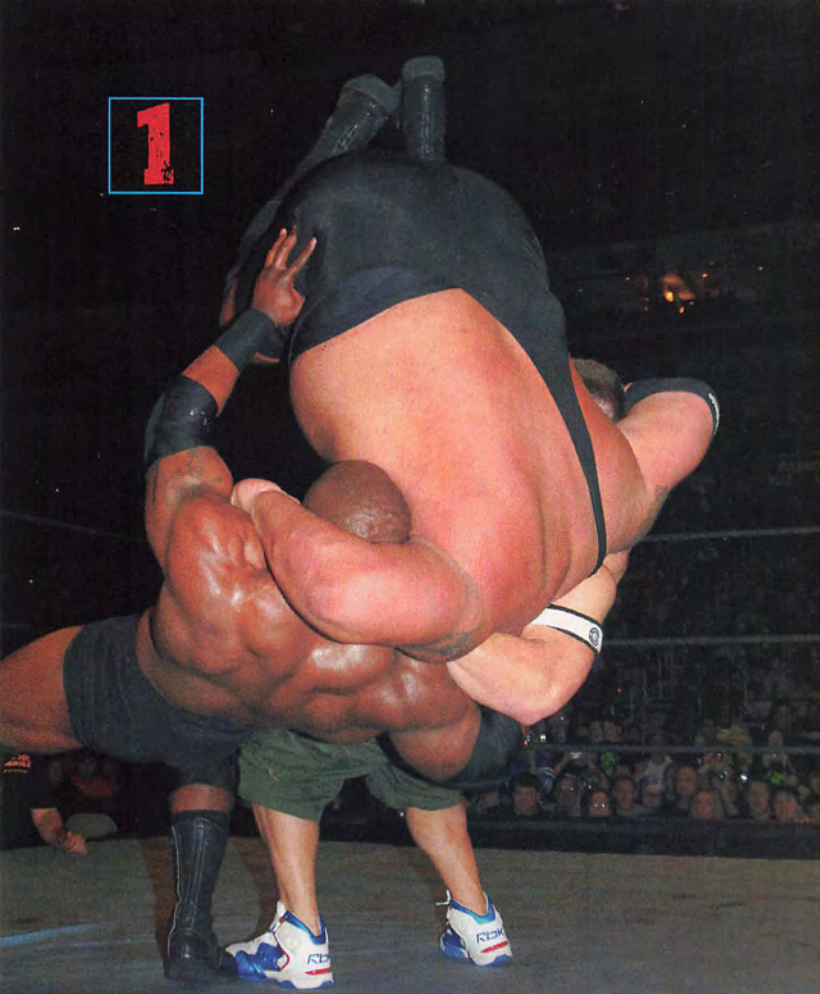
OVERALL VALUE: With Cena and (to a lesser extent) Batista suffering a bit of a backlash from fans, WWE has a lot of hope that Lashley can become the company's next megastar. He's not at that level yet, and it's still not certain whether he can get there. But he's one of just three or four wrestlers upon whom WWE is pinning its hopes for the future. **GRADE: B+**



BOBBY
LASHLEY



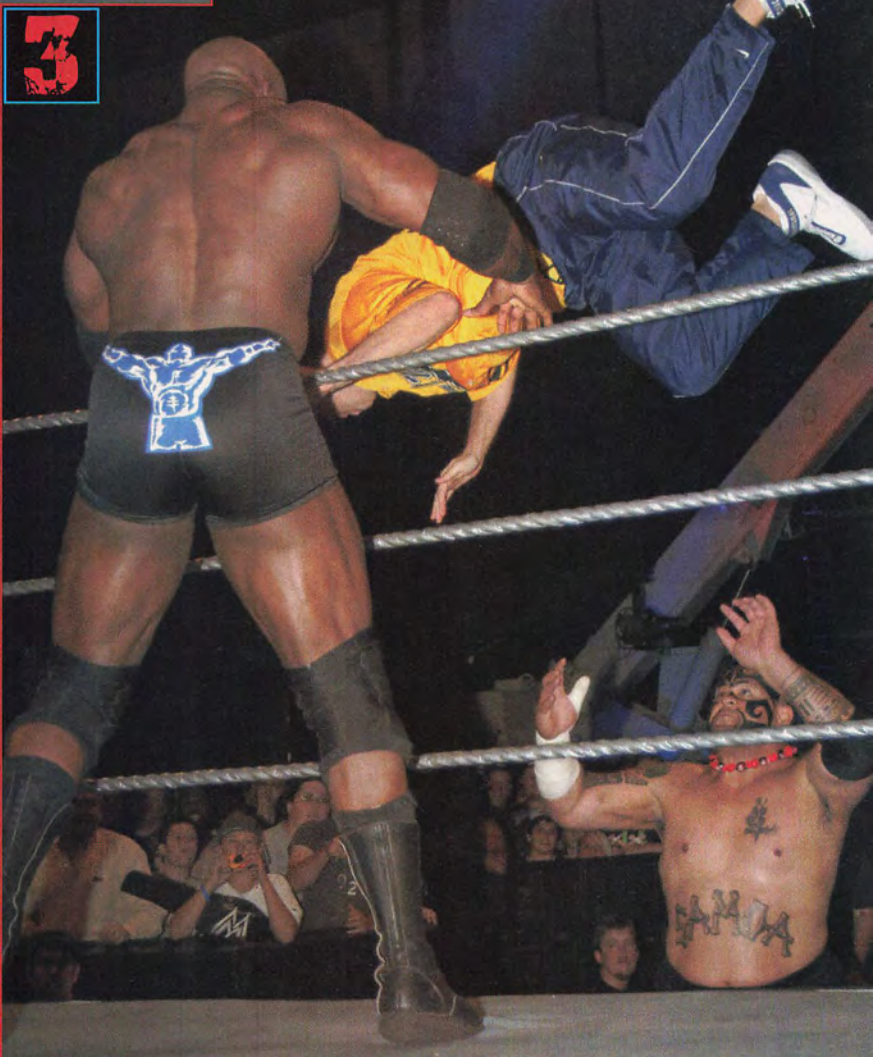
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1 As a member of Team Cena, Bobby Lashley was able to prove his worth was on par with that of Raw World champion John Cena, who aided Lashley in dispensing of the behemoth Big Show.

2 Bobby Lashley has improved all around this year, and, as the face adorning the promotional materials for WWE's 2007 One Night Stand pay-per-view, there was no way Lashley would let himself be shown up by McMahon and his cohorts anymore.

3 It was no secret that Lashley intended to reclaim his ECW title from Mr. McMahon during their street fight at One Night Stand, and—despite interference from Shane McMahon and Umaga—Lashley did just that.

4 Everyone knows that The Donald never loses, which is why Lashley hit it big when Trump handpicked the former "Blaster" to represent him in his hair-vs.-hair match at WrestleMania. After the match, Trump, Lashley, and the match's special referee Steve Austin had the collective honor of shaving the chairman bald.

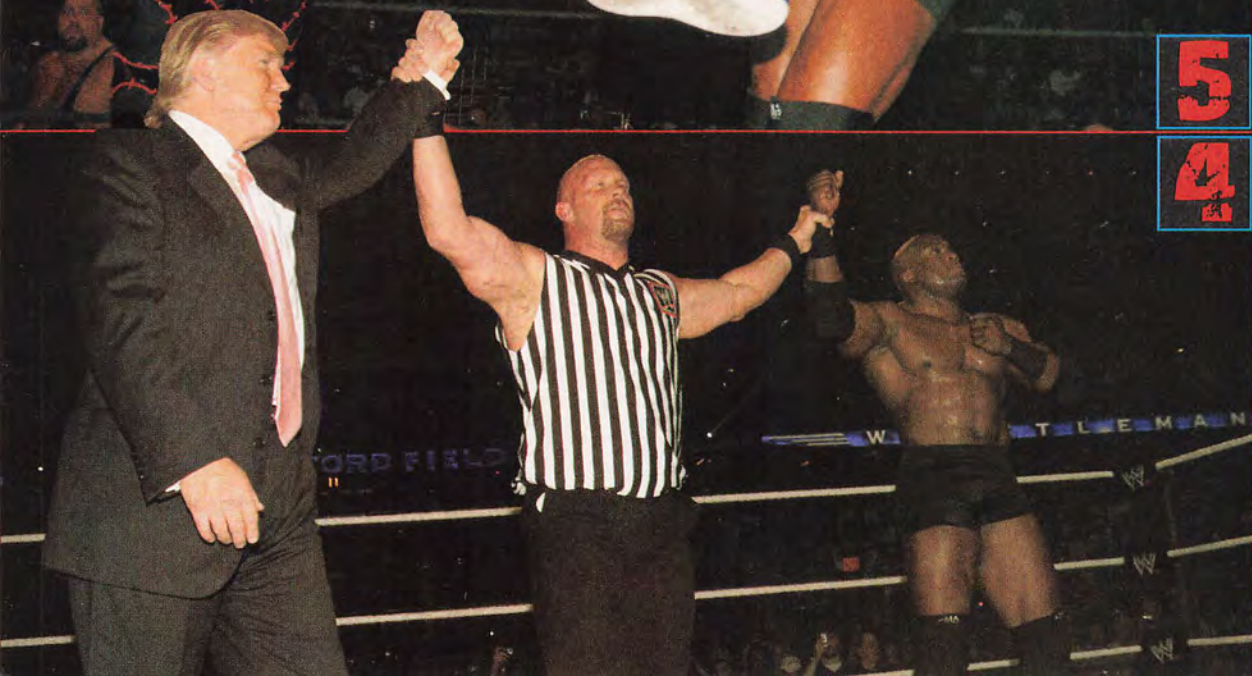
5 Bobby Lashley is just full of surprises. At least, MVP seems to think so. Lashley's most surprising move of the year was his jump and subsequent takeover of WWE's hardcore brand, ECW.

6 After losing his ECW title to Vince McMahon in mendacious fashion at Backlash, Bobby Lashley determinedly reclaimed it at One Night Stand. Following the loss, McMahon was dismal and dejected.



5

4



NIGEL McGUINNESS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The man who fancies himself one part soccer hooligan and one part grappling legend was a dominant ROH pure wrestling champion before dropping that title to Bryan Danielson. He has won over the fans and has emerged as a top contender for the ROH title, but McGuinness hasn't been able to make the next step. He has made it to the upper tier in ROH, but it's hard to say if he has reached his personal peak or if he's still climbing. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: McGuinness knows the importance of self-promotion. With his spiky hair, Union Jack, and entertaining promos, McGuinness stands out from the rest of the pack. He can talk a good game and he can back it up in the ring. All he needs to do now is start marketing Nigel McGuinness-approved irons, and he's on his way to a marketing goldmine. Once ROH starts to become better known nationally, McGuinness' star will rise even higher. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: How can you debate the skills of a guy who held the Pure wrestling title for just a few days short of a year? Once known more for his odd weapon of a choice (his iron), McGuinness showed he had some fine submission wrestling techniques and mat wrestling skills. Of course, he frequently preferred to win matches by countout or rely on other dubious means to retain his title,

but anyone underestimating his wrestling ability is making a big mistake. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: McGuinness is already one of the top stars in ROH, and we think it will be just a matter of time before he establishes himself in a larger promotion. McGuinness has size, a solid gimmick, and good charisma. He wouldn't look the least bit out of place in TNA's six-sided ring or alongside his countrymen William Regal and Dave Taylor in WWE. He has a very good future ahead of him. The only pitfall we can see is if he opts to remain in ROH and is unable to win that company's championship. A failure at this level could hurt his bargaining power with other companies further down the line. **GRADE: B+**

OVERALL VALUE: McGuinness is one of ROH's three top stars today, along with Bryan Danielson and Takeshi Morishima. Of those three, McGuinness has the most swagger, the best promo ability, and the most identifiable character. His flashiness and mannerisms can help ROH as it reaches out to new fans through PPV. Nothing sells pro wrestling better than a good mix of solid grappling and bigger-than-life characters. McGuinness brings the character, and he's no slouch in the grappling department, either. He should be a big player in ROH over the coming months. **GRADE: B+**



NIGEL
McGUINNESS



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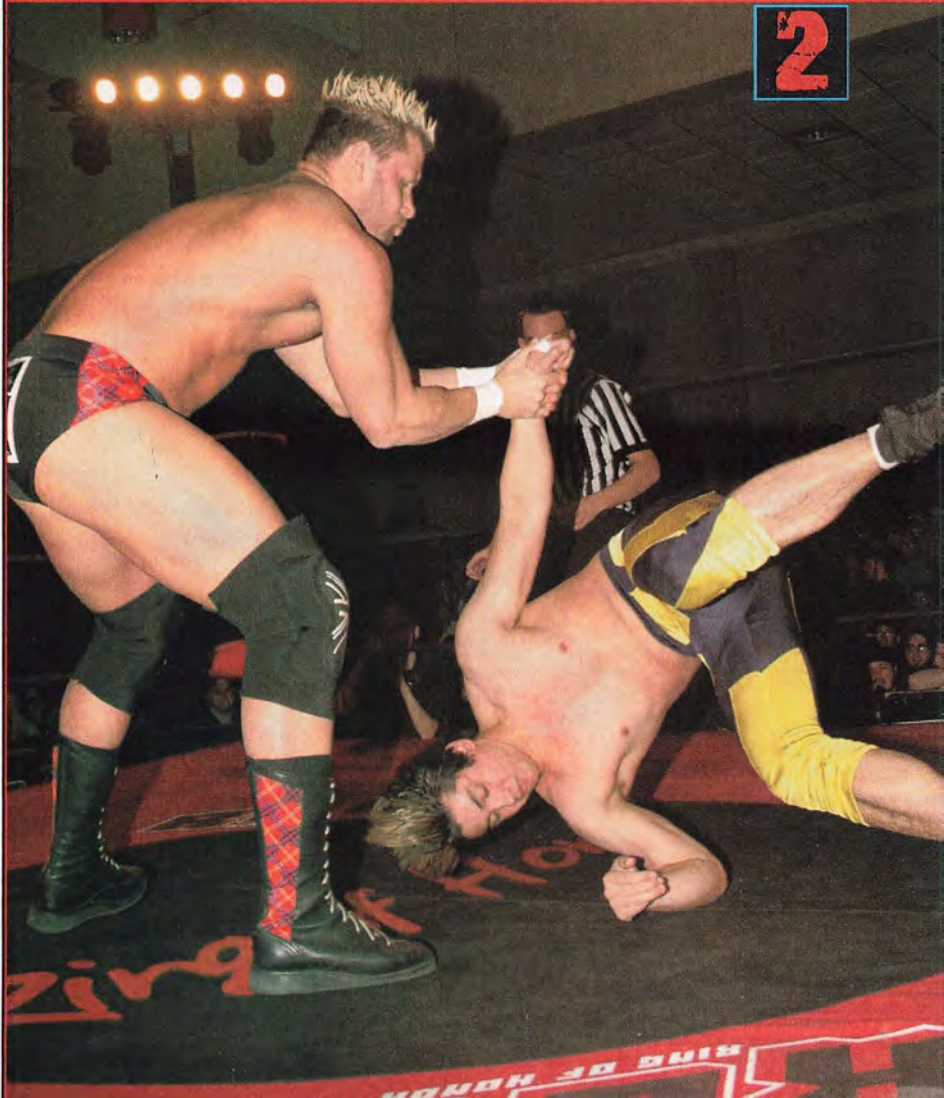
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NIGEL MCGUINNESS

- 1** McGuinness' 350-day run with the now-defunct Pure title impressed fans and critics on both sides of the Atlantic. His classic bouts with Bryan Danielson elevated him to the elite of the Ring of Honor roster.
- 2** Intense promos, a distinct look and gimmick, and exceptional skills make Nigel McGuinness a hot commodity in Ring of Honor. He will be very valuable as ROH tries to lure in fans of the mainstream market.
- 3** McGuinness is expert at utilizing his own weight, and that of his opponents, to injure a particular body part. After eight years in the business, Nigel is still learning—and creating—new maneuvers.
- 4** As one of ROH's top stars, and one with the size (6'2", 220) and charisma the larger promotions value, McGuinness could easily draw the interest of WWE or TNA. If that is indeed his goal, it would be a huge help to capture the ROH title.



4



3

MELINA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: It wasn't long ago when Melina was known simply for her provocative ring entrance and her constant shrieking at ringside during Johnny Nitro's matches. She found herself in the right place at the right time, capitalizing on the vacuum created following the retirement of Trish Stratus and besting Mickie James to win the WWE women's title. Melina has been extremely impressive in her transformation from a valet to being a surprisingly dominant champion. She has surpassed all expectations. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Even the people who despise Melina enjoy her unique ring entrance. At least that's what the crowd's reaction seems to indicate. But you

can't build a marketing campaign entirely around a sexy entrance, especially when Melina is always going out of her way to insult the fans. The fans paid to see her defend the title, purely in hopes of seeing her lose it to whomever she is facing. **GRADE: B-**

REPERTOIRE: The former women's champion continues to find new, effective ways to use her famous flexibility to her advantage. As Candice Michelle stepped up her game, and indeed took the title, Melina developed one of the most impressive finishers on Raw—an inverted DDT into a split-legged guillotine legdrop. Combined with her very stiff roundhouse kicks, her vicious elbow strikes to the jaw, and her scissors front choke on the ropes, Melina has added a very impressive new element to her offense. The hallmark of a great champion is the ability to improve when under pressure, and Melina is doing just that. **GRADE: B+**

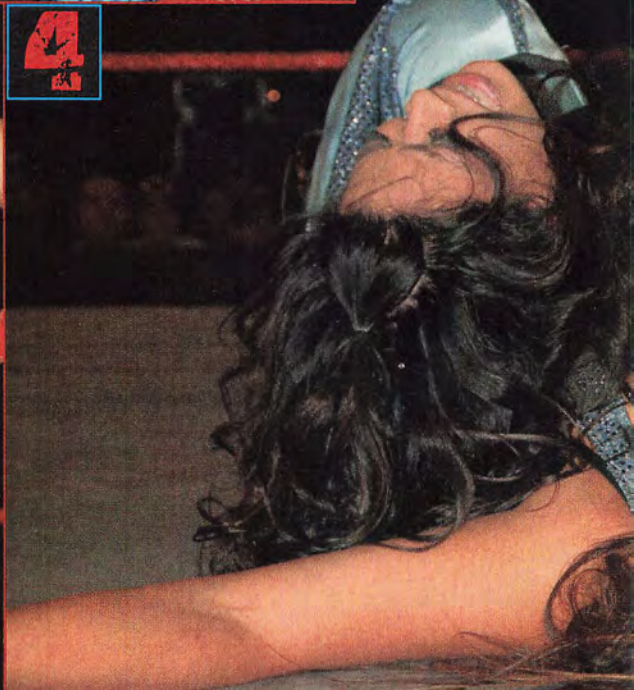
CAREER GROWTH: By virtue of her impressive run as champion, Melina has to be considered the top woman wrestler in the sport, which is absolutely remarkable considering her relative lack of experience. Melina has natural athletic ability and the kind of killer instinct that few of her fellow Divas share. She's gone far in a very short amount of time, and is very likely to get the belt back soon. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Fans boo Jillian Hall because of her awful singing. They boo Cherry and Victoria only when they break the rules. They boo Melina from the moment the first note of her entrance music hits to the moment she leaves the ring area. Not only can Melina inspire the sort of crowd reaction that few of her peers can, but she can also deliver in the ring, showing consistent growth and development as a wrestler. Melina has plenty of critics, but she is also the most unique and well-rounded woman on the WWE roster. **GRADE: B+**



MELINA







1 Although she is more than able to legitimately defeat her foes, Melina is a fan of the “easy-way-out” tactic, often resorting to dishonest means to achieve her mounting number of victories.

2 She’s lovely, and she’s lethal. Poor Torrie Wilson might be able to compete with Melina in the looks department, but she has no chance against the former women’s champ in the ring.

3 Maria Kanellis has often been the victim of Melina’s rage. Melina often intimidates her true opposition by demonstrating her most violent outbursts on less capable wrestlers like Maria.

4 Mickie James was determined to regain the women’s championship belt that used to adorn her waist, but Melina had no intention of allowing James to take what she felt was rightfully hers. In the end, Mickie reclaimed her belt—but for one night only in Paris.

5 Determined to be recognized as more than just another gimmick-match Diva, Melina takes every match as seriously as she would a title match ... even pudding matches. Candice Michelle has most recently been on the receiving end of that serious approach.

6 Soaring on cloud nine thanks to her *Playboy* cover shoot and media attention, Ashley Massaro convinced herself that she could dominate then-women’s champion Melina, but Melina made sure to put Ashley in her place—with her back flat on the canvas.

MELINA



INSIDE Wrestling

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July 1986: A Toast To Wrestling's Odd Couple: Kerry Von Erich & Michael Hayes Unite! Also: DiBiase-Savage-Hogan, Dillon & Horsemen, Sting, Rick Steambot.

Aug. 1988: What Randy Savage Must Do To Escape The Shadow Of Hulk Hogan. Also: Hyatt-Gilbert, Sting, Michael Hayes, Honky Tonk.

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Dec. 1988: Exclusive "Hotseat" Interview: Roddy Piper—Will He Ever Be Back? Also: Powers of Pain, Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Bambi-Mystic, Kevin Von Erich.

Feb. 1989: Tully & Arn Will Fail Under Bobby Heenan! A Special Analysis By J.J. Dillon. Also: Hogan-Bossman, Sgt. Slaughter, Lawler-Inside Wrestling, Davis-Wayne.

June 1989: Finally, Fortune Favors The Challenger: Rick Steambot Wins Ric Flair's NWA Belt! Also: Morton & Gibson, Macho Madness-Hulkamania, Lex Luger, Jimmy Jack Funk.

Aug. 1989: Your Ballots Are In: Hulkamania Rules! Also: Tanaka & Diamond, Rick Steambot, Bigelow-Rhodes, Rick Rude, Jim Cornette.

Sept. 1989: Savage Is Shamed By Hogan—Only Elizabeth Can Save Him Now. Also: Lex Luger, Mil Mascara, Dusty Rhodes, Bushwhackers, Skandor Akbar.

Oct. 1989: Dusty Rhodes' WWF Hit List. Also: Hall-Pillman-Vicious, Curt Hennig, Warriors, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

Nov. 1989: Please, Elizabeth—Don't Wrestle Sherri! Also: Mil Mascara, Dangerously-Cornette, Sting-T. Funk, Lex Luger, Jake Roberts.

Dec. 1989: The Dusty Road Is Paved With Gold: The American Dream Lives On! Also: Ric Flair, Hogan-Zeus, Embury-Chu-hi, Lex Luger, Larry Zbyszko.

Jan. 1990: Why Sting's Friendship Is Tearing Ric Flair Apart! Also: Roberts-DiBiase, Rock 'n' Rolls, Lawler-Embury, Hulk Hogan, Paul E. Dangerously.

Feb. 1990: Sex Symbol Showdown: Rude's Out ... Piper's In ... And The Fans Love It! Also: Warriors-Skyscrapers, Jimmy Snuka, Tom Zenk, Destruction Crew, Kerry Von Erich.

March 1990 (Special Issue): The '80s: A Rousing Review Of A Dynamic Decade. Also: Bobby Heenan, Ric Flair, Paul Orndorff.

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May 1990: WrestleMania VI Main Event: Hulk Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior: Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Jerry Lawler, Al Perez, Lex Luger, Woman, LPWA.

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July 1990: Our Urgent Plea To Hulk Hogan & The Ultimate Warrior: Team Up And Eliminate These Men. Also: Steiners, Sting, Earthquake, Kokina Maximus, Tessa.

Aug. 1990: The Experts Agree: Lex Luger Has Made Ric Flair A Broken Man. Also: Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior, Pillman & Zenk, Terry Taylor, Jerry Lawler.

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Oct. 1990: Sting: "I Feel Like I've Conquered The World!" Also: Legion of Doom, Bushwhackers, El Gigante, Mike Rotundo, Juice Patrol.

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Dec. 1990: Halloween Havoc Horror! Why Sting Is Spooked By Sid Vicious. Also: Hulk Hogan, Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Larry Zbyszko.

Jan. 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: The Legion Of Doom Will Lead You To De-

struction. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Chris Adams, Steiners, Lawler-T. Funk.

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Dec. 1991: A Night To Remember: SummerSlam Provides Heat For The Cold Months Ahead. Also: Alexandra York, Simmons-Luger, Lane & Cornette, Leatherface.

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Dec. 2002: The Impossible Dream, Part 2: Can Angle Win Another Olympic Gold? Also: Shane McMahon, PTC-WWE, Trish Stratus, Malice, next best things.

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Feb. 2005: Why Randy Orton Will Succeed Where Brock Lesnar Failed. Also: JBL, Batista, Dudleys, Striker, Jeff Hardy, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

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ELIJAH BURKE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: You may not know this, but last year, Elijah Burke was nearly called up to the Raw roster as a member of The Spirit Squad. Burke, considered one of the most promising young stars in OVW at the time, had to be frustrated watching five of his fellow OVW competitors get the call-up to Raw and feud with Shawn Michaels and Triple-H as he was competing in front of a couple of hundred fans down in Louisville. When Burke finally got the call, it was as manager of Sylvester Terkay on Smackdown. After a cup of coffee there, they were sent to ECW, and, after just a few weeks, Terkay was released. Burke's golden opportunity seemed to be slipping through his fingertips. But instead of panicking under pressure, Burke took "The Man-

Bear's" release as an opportunity to build the New Breed and declare war on the founding fathers of ECW. Burke's New Breed might have lost at WrestleMania, but today Rob Van Dam (presumably) and Sabu are gone, Tommy Dreamer is in the low mid-card, and Sandman is on Raw. Burke is a top star in ECW while all of The Spirit Squad, except for Kenny Dykstra, is back in OVW. **GRADE: B+**

MARKETABILITY: As a fan favorite in OVW, Burke emoted a true underdog persona that connected with the fans. People genuinely wanted to see him win and do well for himself. In ECW, he has done a complete 180, becoming one of the most despised men in that brand. That type of range—to effectively make fans love you or hate you—is a rare quality, and Burke's got it. He would, however, be much more marketable as a fan favorite than a rulebreaker. **GRADE: B-**

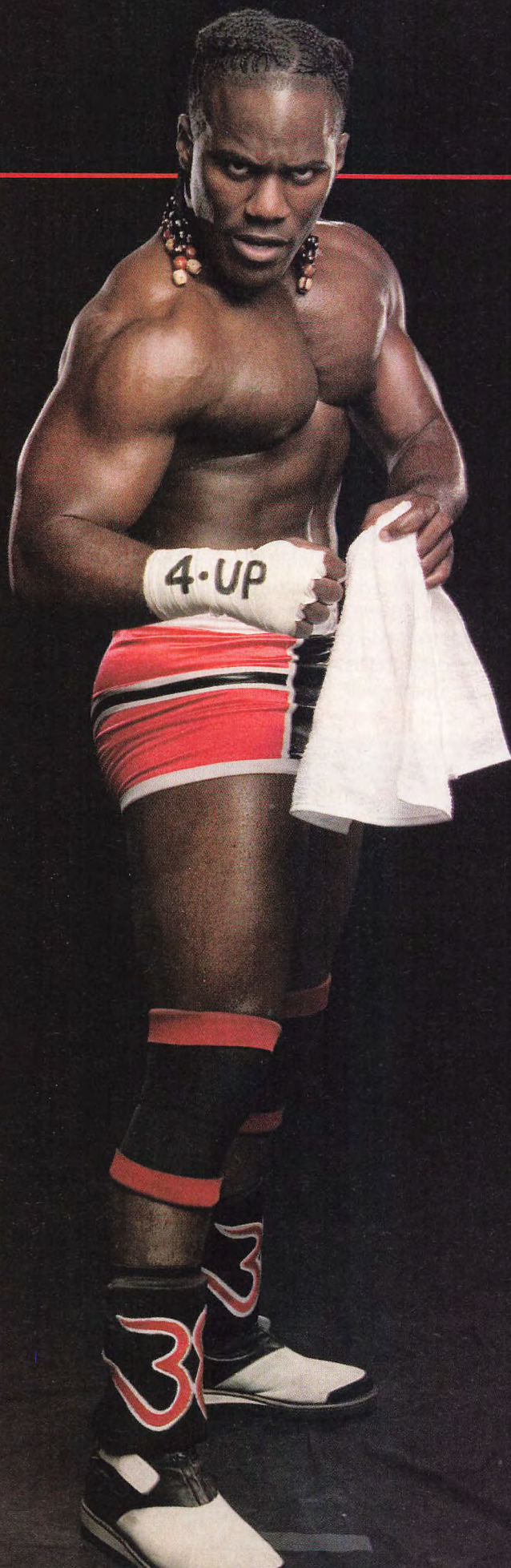
REPERTOIRE: Burke tends to enjoy working on an opponent's upper back and shoulders, softening them for his double knee-smash to the spine. Virtually every move Burke makes—snap suplexes, back-breakers, reverse chinlocks—are all designed to weaken the back. An injured back can slow an opponent down and make it difficult to breathe, which gives Burke an opportunity to utilize his quickness and strike again as his opponent recuperates. It's an example of an offense designed purely around a wrestler's natural strengths, and it shows a veteran's mindset at work in the mind of a young competitor. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: As we mentioned in the "Goal Achievement" assessment, Burke has gone from OVW obscurity to a bit role on Smackdown to a featured spot on ECW. He's a textbook case of a wrestler making a smart progression to the big leagues. **GRADE: A-**

OVERALL VALUE: Burke is a key figure in ECW and promises to be for the foreseeable future. A babyface run on Raw or Smackdown could be the next step in his progression, but right now, he's ideal as the man ECW fans love to hate. **GRADE: B**



ELIJAH
BURKE



LANCE CADE & TREVOR MURDOCH

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: You've got to give credit to Lance Cade and Trevor Murdoch. It really looked like The Hardys had their number. Instead of getting frustrated by their loss, Cade and Murdoch professed admiration and respect for The Hardys. After the two teams formed an alliance, Cade and Murdoch finally won the Raw World tag team title in a relatively clean contest. Hey, Cade and Murdoch can't be blamed if the referee didn't notice Jeff's foot on the ropes. Now Cade and Murdoch are back to the hell-raising, brawling style that suits them best. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Murdoch and Cade are a fine team, but they're not exactly the most photogenic team around. Unlike The Hardys, young girls don't exactly squeal when Murdoch takes off his shirt (though Cade's physique is nothing to scoff at). But two tobacco-chewing, roughneck Texans don't sell a lot of glossy 8x10s. Now, if WWE could arrange a cross-promotion with

"The Blue-Collar Comedy Tour," maybe they'd be on to something. **GRADE: C-**

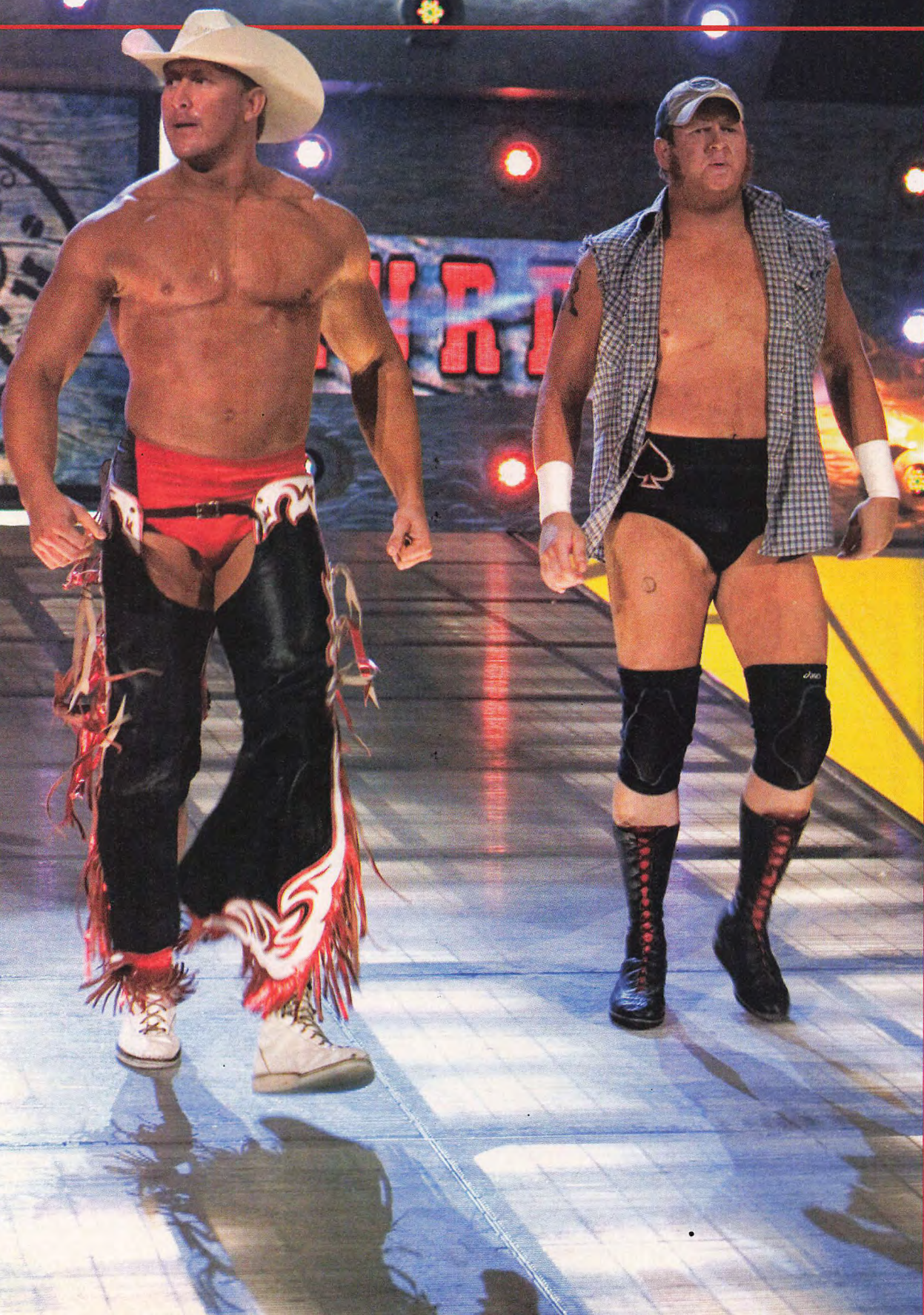
REPERTOIRE: Cade, a protégé of Shawn Michaels, has struggled for the past few years. Very often, it looked as if he wanted to showcase too many moves. He threw impressive dropkicks and took down opponents with crisp, deep armdrags, even using an occasional leapfrog, which is impressive for a man of his size. Many times, Cade would try to dazzle opponents with HBK-inspired moves but ended up giving his foes enough room in the ring to counterstrike. Murdoch has helped Cade get back to basics and better utilize his impressive strength to wear down opponents and limit opportunities for counterattacks. Together, Cade and Murdoch bring out the best in one another, with simple—yet effective—double-team maneuvers. And, lest anyone forget about Cade's background, the big man can slip in a little razzle-dazzle from time to time. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: It wasn't too long ago that Cade and Murdoch seemed to be on the verge of falling off the Raw roster. On the rare occasions when they appeared on TV, they usually suffered quick and decisive losses, sometimes even when they were on the loaded end of a handicap team vs. DX or John Cena. They wisely got out of the "hired thug" role, won The Hardys' confidence, then struck and captured the tag belts. It was a huge turnaround for a talented, but underutilized, team. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Cade and Murdoch are now positioned as the anchor of the Raw tag team division. The move of Paul London and Brian Kendrick from Smackdown to Raw (via the draft) promises some exciting clashes between the brawlers and the high-flyers. This feud could be reminiscent of some of the old battles between The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson or The Fantastics vs. The Shepherders. Cade and Murdoch promise to keep the tag division exciting and competitive. **GRADE: B**



LANCE
CADE & MURDOCH
TREVOR



CANDICE MICHELLE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We're not exactly sure when it happened, but Candice Michelle has actually developed into a pretty capable wrestler. The Go Daddy girl is competing neck-and-neck with Melina to become WWE's new standard-bearer in the women's division. Candice Michelle must have received a wake-up call when Victoria's wicked kick broke her nose. She was more concerned about doing a little dance and looking pretty than protecting herself. Now, after her win over Melina at Vengeance, Candice is the new WWE women's champion. With a little more work, she could become the next Trish Stratus. **GRADE: B+**

MARKETABILITY: About 70 percent of wrestling fans are male. About 95 percent of those fans would do anything for a mere glimpse of the former Playmate. Yup ... she's marketable. **GRADE: A+**

REPERTOIRE: Michelle's biggest improvements have been defensive in nature. Her reaction time has improved. Her reflexes have improved. Her guard and

footwork have improved. She has learned to duck behind an opponent reaching for her and land a kick to the midsection to take the upper hand. Most ambitiously, she's recently begun using a version of the tarantula stretch on the ropes, though she frequently has difficulty applying it. She's a far cry from the hair-pulling, slapping Diva of last year, but she still needs more development.

GRADE: B

CAREER GROWTH: When word got out that Michelle wanted to be a serious wrestler and not just eye candy, bikini contest competitor, we have to admit we were skeptical. She seemed like she was getting into wrestling as a lark, like she thought it would be a fun little hobby. Over the past year, she's taken her lumps. Surprisingly, each time she has come back for more. Michelle has earned our respect. She still has a way to go, though. Each week, her ring attire gets skimpier and skimpier. That might distract the men in the audience, but it has no effect on her opponents. We're not complaining, just noting that she has not yet adjusted her mind set to that of a completely serious athlete.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Every year, WWE brings in a fresh batch of interchangeable would-be Divas. When one distinguishes herself enough to stand out from the rest of the pack, and then actually puts in the time and effort to learn the craft of wrestling, you know you've got something special. On top of having mainstream appeal and being the only current WWE star ever to appear in both a national Super Bowl commercial and on *The Tonight Show*, Candice has shown she is dedicated to improve as a wrestler. She's not just a model, but also a model female wrestler and a tremendous asset to the women's division. **GRADE: B+**



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CANDICE

MICHELLE



MARCUS COR VON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Two years ago, the "Alpha Male" seemed to be a lock to win the NWA title. His charisma and intensity were unmatched, and some people—including the editors of this very magazine—were comparing Monty Brown to Bill Goldberg. Brown never made it to the NWA title; an inexplicable heel turn and promotional politics short-circuited Brown's TNA run. Brown needed a change of scenery, and he found it in ECW. We're still not sure

what prompted him to change his ring name to Marcus Cor Von, but at least he's made a fresh start in ECW. Aligning with the New Breed took the pressure off Cor Von. He doesn't have to carry the company on his back. He can just concentrate on winning matches and slowly climb up the ladder of contention, which is exactly what he's doing. **GRADE: B+**

MARKETABILITY: The only thing standing between Cor Von and superstardom is Elijah Burke. We still think Cor Von can be one of the top stars in the sport. In an interview with this magazine, Dixie Carter once said that Cor Von had the staff of *The Best Damn Sports Show Period* and ESPN buzzing about his incredible natural appeal. If he breaks away from Burke and the New Breed, he could be the biggest star on the ECW brand. **GRADE: A-**

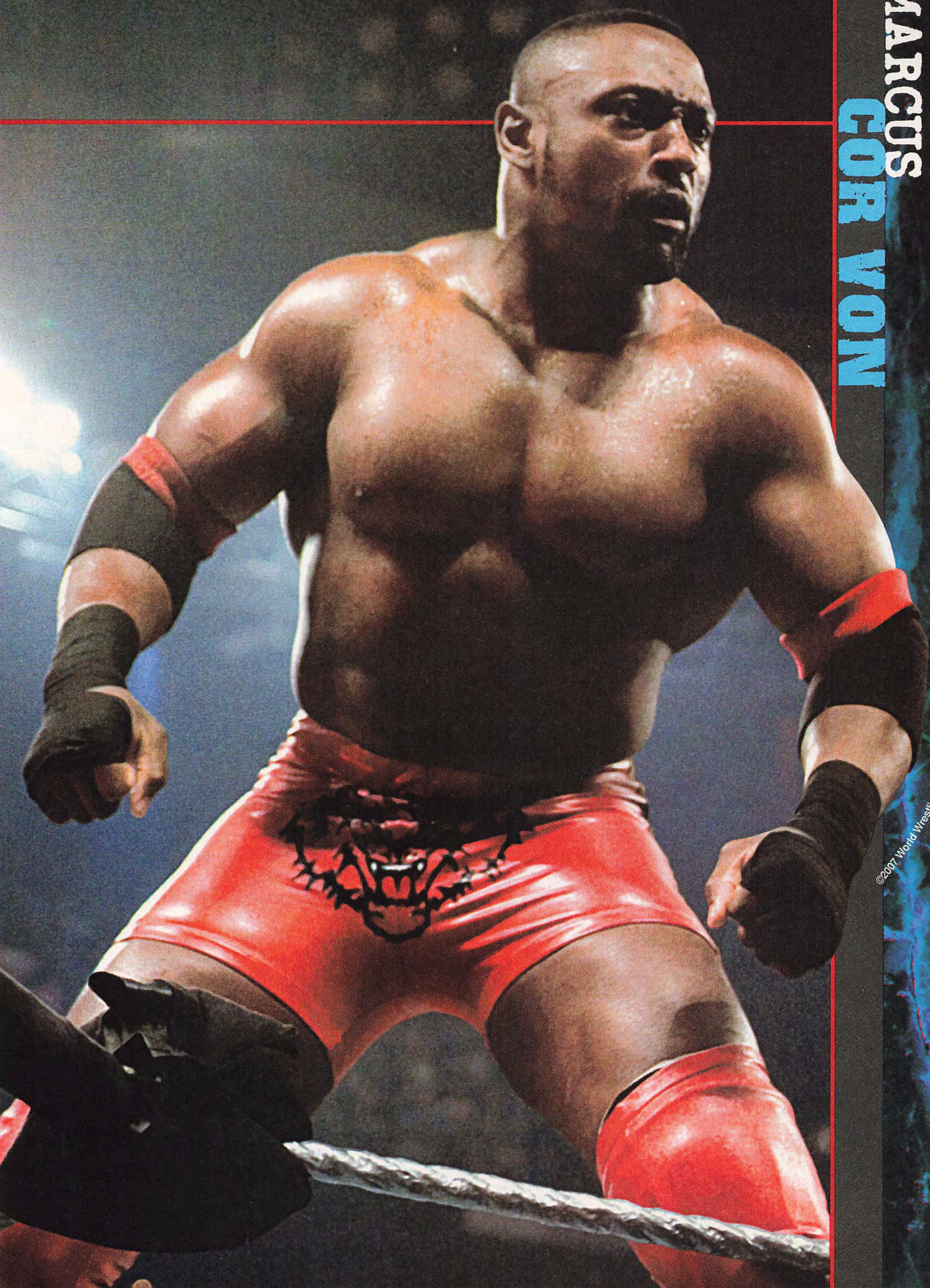
REPERTOIRE: The "Alpha Male" is synonymous with the pounce, his running shoulder tackle that has put dozens of opponents down for the count. When Cor Von first entered ECW, however, he used a type of rolling arm-bar submission to score his first few victories. It was something we hadn't seen out of Cor Von in TNA, and it seemed to indicate he was ready to go beyond a simple name change and add a new component to his game. Since joining the New Breed, though, Cor Von has gone back to the pounce, which is just as effective as it's ever been. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: Why Cor Von never won the NWA title is one of those wrestling mysteries that may never be fully explained. When it became apparent to him that the NWA title was out of reach, he wisely jumped to WWE. Starting in ECW in a smaller role has allowed him to make a smooth transition from the six-sided ring to WWE. Cor Von has put himself in position for a major breakout. **GRADE: A**

OVERALL VALUE: Who will be the man to carry the ECW brand, C.M. Punk or Cor Von? That's a tough question. One thing is certain: Cor Von will be a headliner soon ... either in ECW or on Raw. **GRADE: B+**



MARCUS CORVON



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DEUCE & DOMINO

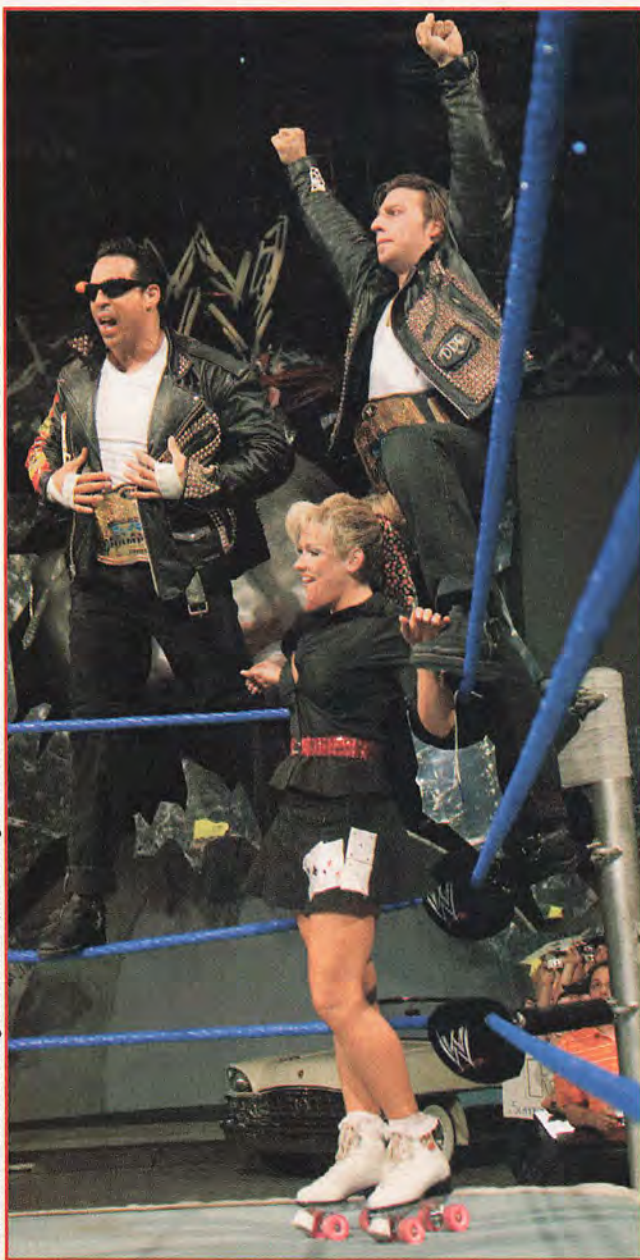
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When Deuce and Domino beat Paul London and Brian Kendrick for the Smackdown World tag team belts in Milan, Italy, a lot of people considered it an upset. But since winning that title on April 17, the two guys with a *Grease* fetish have successfully defended their straps against the former champs, and now that London and Kendrick are on Raw, Deuce and Domino are Smackdown's dominant tandem. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: With their Brill Cream pompadours, vintage leather jackets, and bobby-soxed, roller-skating cheerleader, Deuce and Domino are an act right out of 1956. Their look may not be timely, but they certainly stand out, especially in their hot pink Cadillac. They've got a lot of character, but it doesn't translate into marketing dollars. Nobody's clamoring for Cherry poodle skirts or Domino-brand dominoes ... but if they were to make a fan favorite turn, they might become as popular as Fonzie (that's The Fonz, not Bill Alfonso). Okay, maybe not. But, with a better attitude, they could become a very marketable team. **GRADE: C-**

REPERTOIRE: This is where Deuce and Domino surprise their opponents. Just because they look like *Happy Days* rejects doesn't mean they wrestle an old-fashioned style. Domino uses his power to set up some very nifty strikes by Deuce who—in case you don't know—is the son of Jimmy “Superfly” Snuka. Deuce's running kick out of Domino's snapmare is just as stiff on the neck as a piledriver. Their West Side stomp (a bearhug into a running enzugiri) would make The Hart Foundation or The Midnight Express envious. Domino's brainbuster is intense, and Deuce clearly has inherited some of his father's aerial prowess. In their two years together as a team, Deuce and Domino have developed one of the best sets of tag team moves in the sport. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Several other teams have made the jump from OVW to a WWE brand in recent years, only to fall flat. The Heartbreakers came and went before anyone noticed. K.C. James and Idol Stevens were totally outshined by their manager, Michelle McCool. Heck, the Daltons never even got a TV match! Deuce and Domino broke the OVW curse and have established themselves as dominant champions. **GRADE: A-**

OVERALL VALUE: It's been said time and time again, but it still holds true—a champion is only as good as his challengers. There aren't many teams on the Smackdown roster right now. Without competition, Deuce and Domino are likely to be left off PPV cards and struggle for TV time, just as London and Kendrick did. To bring true value, they need more competition than The Major Brothers. Unfortunately, that's out of their control. **GRADE: B**



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DEUCE & DOMINO



BRIAN KENDRICK & PAUL LONDON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Paul London and Brian Kendrick reigned atop the Smackdown tag team division for almost a year before being toppled from their perch by Deuce and Domino. Though Deuce and Domino were impressive, using their size and strength to overwhelm Kendrick and London, the high-flying former champions seemed to be well on their way to regaining the title when they were drafted to the Raw brand. As impressive as London and Kendrick's reign was, allow us to play devil's advocate. London and Kendrick were possibly the most unassuming champions in WWE history. They were frequently left off the major pay-per-view events, and sometimes didn't even get face time on Smackdown. When they debuted on Raw, a sizeable portion of the audience didn't even recognize them. How valuable is a record-setting title reign when so few people notice? **GRADE: B**

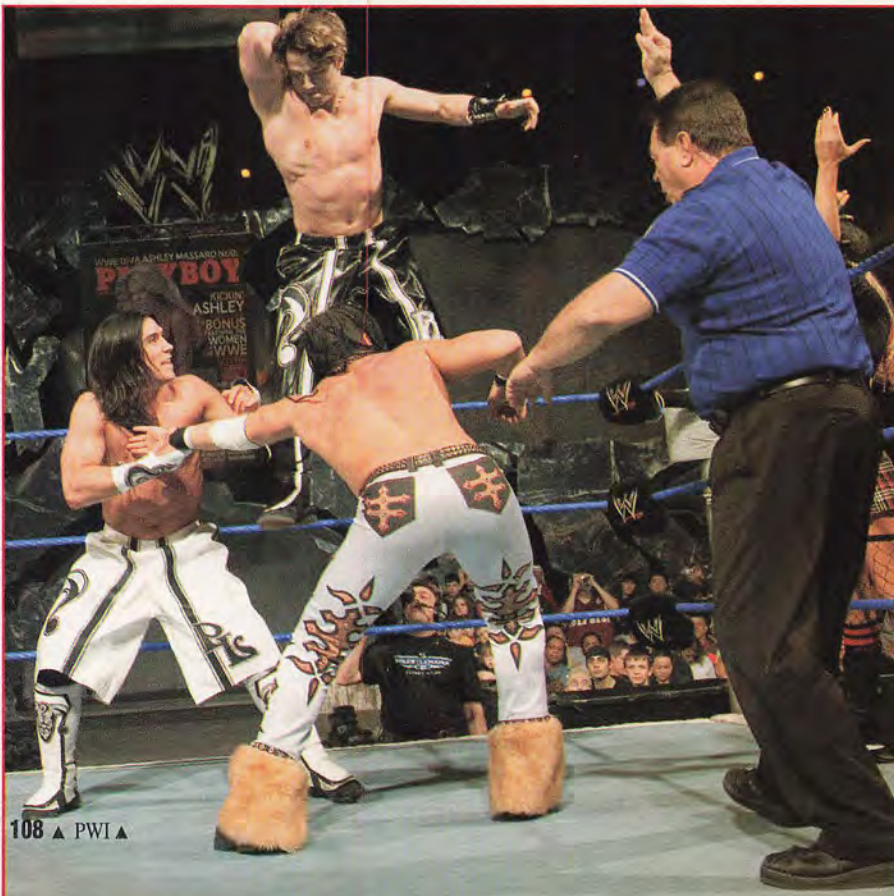
MARKETABILITY: London and Kendrick are like a younger version of The Hardys, only they are more technically sound and have experience against a far greater variety of competition than the Hardys did at the time of their first reign. However, London and

Kendrick need more interview time. As talented as they are, WWE fans (particularly Raw fans) have not had an opportunity to learn more about them. As soon as WWE allows more time for character development, London and Kendrick can become major sensations ... but they're not there yet. **GRADE: C+**

REPERTOIRE: Both London and Kendrick have had distinguished singles careers in Ring of Honor and elsewhere on the independent scene. London's battles with Samoa Joe and Kendrick's wars with Austin Aries are legendary among ROH faithful. But London and Kendrick rarely have the luxury of wrestling 20-plus-minute bouts that showcase their technical skills. Instead, they have to rely on a quick, stick-and-move offense to keep the upper hand. However, that offensive style comes fraught with risks. London frequently escapes armbars with a showy backflip, but just as frequently hesitates to admire his handiwork and takes a punch to the face. Kendrick often gets caught on the far side of the ring and takes a hellacious beating because of it. Technically, London and Kendrick are fantastic, but they need a lot of work in terms of ring awareness and generalship. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: London and Kendrick accomplished everything they could on Smackdown. Moving to Raw is a make-or-break prospect. If they succeed, they can become WWE's top tandem. If they fail, they will be yet another undersized duo who couldn't hack it in WWE. **GRADE: B+**

OVERALL VALUE: The WWE powers-that-be have to hope London and Kendrick thrive on Raw. They are the company's most exciting and innovative tag team. They have tremendous marketing potential and could jump-start the moribund Raw tag division. But, if they don't make a quick impact, they're virtually worthless. **GRADE: B**



**BRIAN
KENDRICK & PAUL
LONDON**



THE LATIN AMERICAN EXCHANGE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Homicide and Hernandez have been one of the most surprisingly effective teams in recent memory. They have taunted teams such as The Naturals, VKM, and Team 3D like matadors waving red flags in front of a bunch of angry bulls, and usually managed to come out on top. LAX suffered a pair of tough recent losses, however, dropping the tag belts to Team 3D at Lockdown and losing their manager and mouthpiece, Konnan, in June. With The Steiners, Basham and Damaja, and VKM clamoring for title shots, the Konnan-less LAX will have its work cut out for them in terms of recapturing the belts. **GRADE: B+**

MARKETABILITY: Konnan is one of the most controversial figures in the sport—and one of the most charismatic. Homicide and Hernandez are strong, silent types who relied on Konnan to do all the trash-talking and keep attention focused on his amigos.

Konnan helped LAX build a tremendous cult following (particularly among Latino fans), but the team's commercial value dropped once Konnan asked for his release from TNA. **GRADE: B**

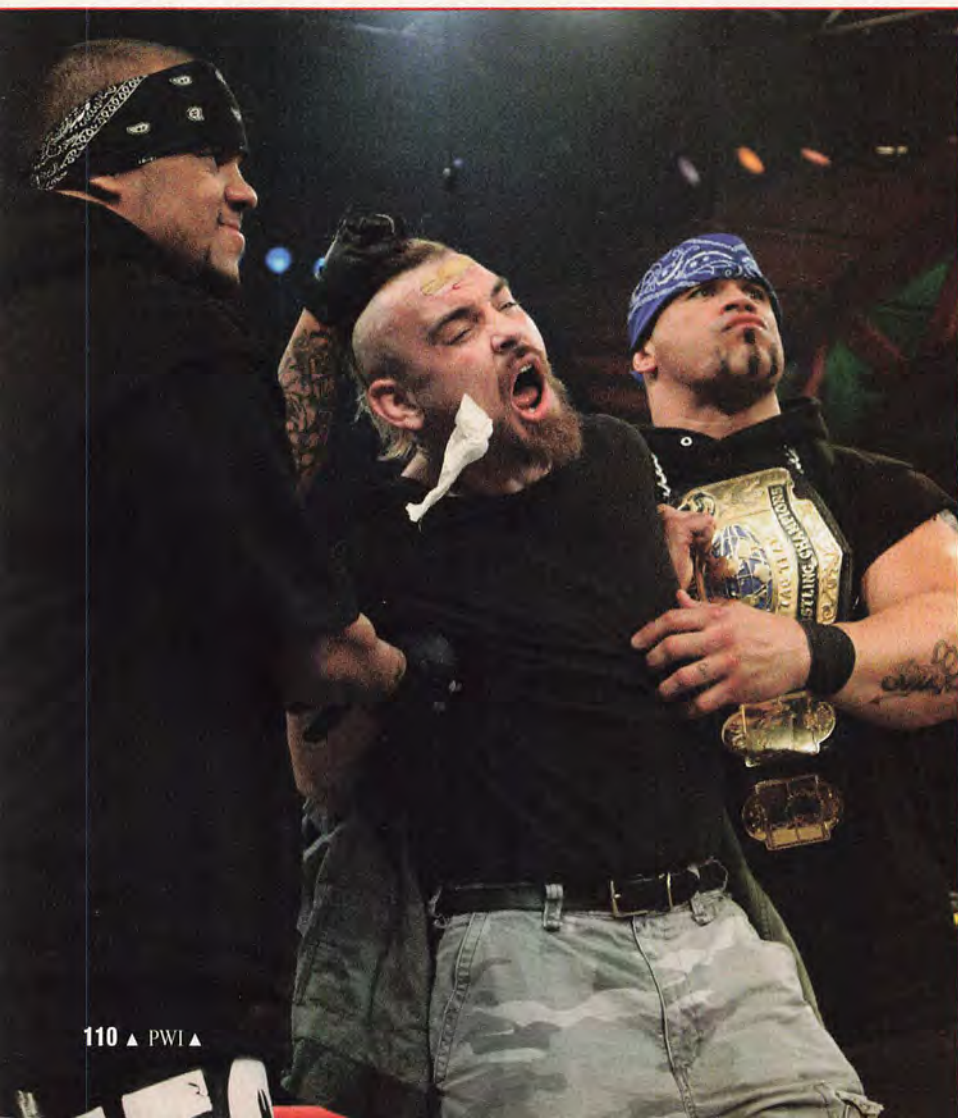
REPERTOIRE: LAX is like a modern-day Hart Foundation. Homicide is the smaller, more technically sound member of the team, while Hernandez brings the raw power. Believe it or not, Homicide may actually be a more technically skilled wrestler than Bret Hart was at the same stage, and Jim Neidhart only wishes he could have bench-pressed what Hernandez does for warm-ups. Their styles complement one another perfectly. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: LAX was TNA's top tandem through the first half of 2007, but they are at a crossroads. Without Konnan, there's a very real chance

LAX could get a smaller role in the company and less visible matches. Plus, Konnan didn't make many friends with management when he claimed LAX was being held back due to promotional politics and insinuating the company wasn't interested in reaching out to Hispanic fans. With Konnan gone, there's a chance LAX may be punished for those remarks.

GRADE: B

OVERALL VALUE: Homicide and Hernandez bring excitement with them whenever they come to the ring. They are a much better team than VKM, The Steiners, and possibly even Team 3D, all of whom are a step or two past their primes. LAX is just hitting its stride and has the potential to become a marketing juggernaut. But without a manager supporting them, there's a very good chance they will be overlooked. Either Homicide needs to put in a call to his old ROH manager, Julius Smokes, or they should get chummy with Hector Guerrero. They are a team in desperate need of good management. **GRADE: B**



THE LATIN AMERICAN EXCHANGE



SANTINO MARELLA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: A year ago, Santino Marella was at home eating linguine and watching Raw on TV. The closest he got to a wrestling ring was the third row. Today, he is the reigning Intercontinental champion. Or, at least that's the rags-to-riches story WWE Creative would have you believe. In reality, Marella had already been under a WWE developmental contract well before that fateful night in Italy when he improbably won the Intercontinental title from Umaga. While he may not exactly have been plucked out of the audience at random, he certainly came out of nowhere to win one of the most prestigious championships in the sport ... even if he received a major assist from Bobby Lashley to do it. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Marella got a Hogan-esque ovation in Italy following his upset win over Umaga. His subsequent ovations have been—to put it nicely—substantially more reserved. There's still a whole lot we don't know about Marella. His impressive ink work notwithstanding, he has a pretty bland look. He hasn't established any big signature moves yet. To date, he's still considered a fluke champion, largely undeserving of

the belt he wears. He can certainly have appeal to fans of an Italian background, but Santino Marella remains largely an unknown. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: We know Marella has got a lot of heart and determination. We have heard that he is a skilled submission wrestler who is a big fan of MMA. But Marella has not had much of an opportunity to showcase those skills to date. He was able to fend off a series of determined challenges by Chris Masters, but he didn't fare as well against Umaga and lost the I-C title. There's not enough here upon which to base an accurate assessment. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

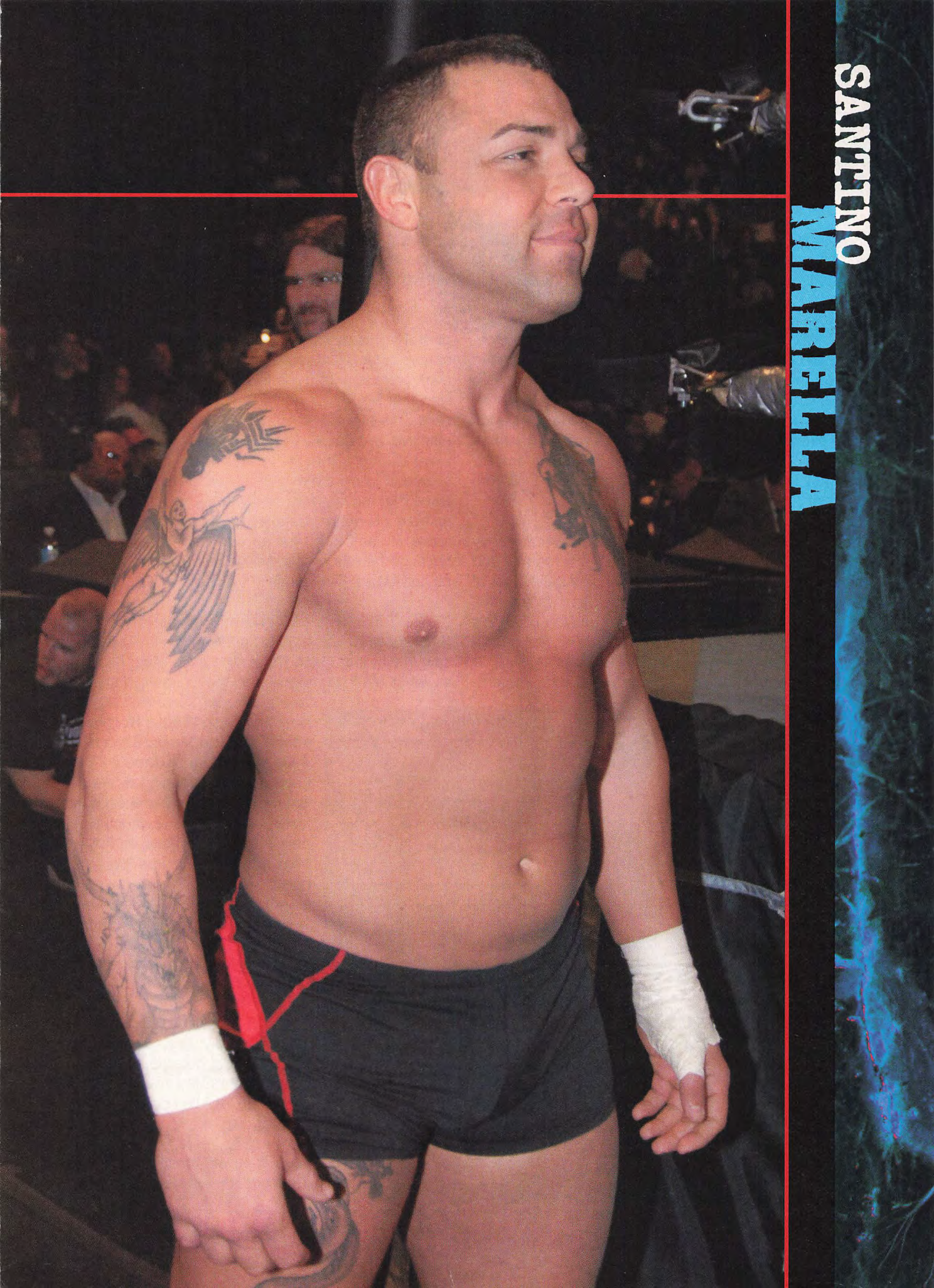
CAREER GROWTH: The overwhelming majority of wrestling hopefuls never make it to the WWE developmental system. Most of those developmental competitors never get the call-up to WWE. Of those fortunate few who make it to the big stage of WWE, fewer still win a major championship. Marella did it all in one night. However, debuting with such a big bang can have some substantial drawbacks: When you start near the top, the eventual fall can be devastating.

Marella is in a good spot today, but it's difficult to know if the path he's on will lead to future success, or if he'll ultimately be exposed as the fluke he seems to be. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Those who have followed Marella's career since his first days in OVW will tell you Marella has plenty of upside potential. Some even go so far as to compare him to Tazz in his heyday. But the spotlight is on Marella right now. He needs to make a major impact to demonstrate he's more than just a lucky "goom-bah" who happened to be in the right place at the right time. After all, just about anybody could have lied atop Umaga after Lashley dropped him to the canvas. The question now is how well he deals with adversity for the first time. **GRADE: B**



SANTINO
MARELLA



MONTEL VONTAVIOUS PORTER

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: WrestleMania 23 was the biggest day of Montel Vontavious Porter's career. Up until that point, the man the Smackdown brand lauded as its "highest-priced free agent acquisition" had done very little to live up to the considerable hype the blue brand was heaping upon him. In fact, the announcement that MVP would actually receive such a coveted spot on the WrestleMania card—in a U.S. title match against Chris Benoit—raised a few eyebrows. But MVP wrestled a tremendous scientific bout against Benoit that night, and immediately earned the respect that had eluded him. Since that losing effort, MVP has improved, ultimately winning the U.S. title in two straight falls from Benoit at Judgment Day. **GRADE: B+**

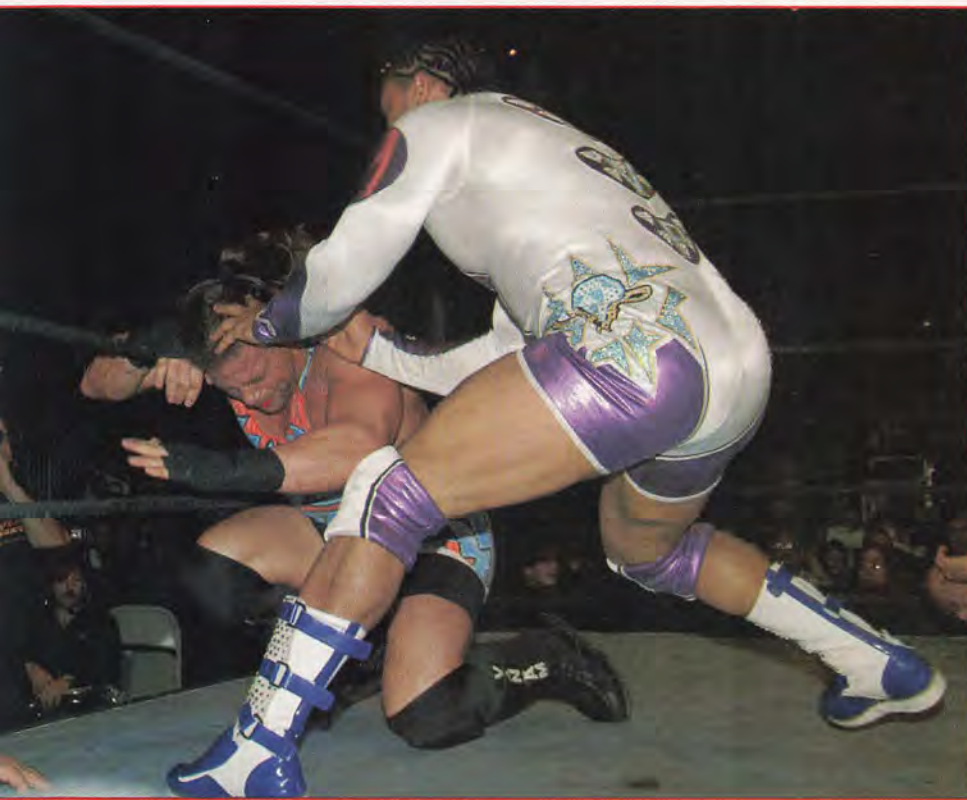
MARKETABILITY: MVP is WWE's answer to Randy Moss and Terrell Owens. He's brash, arrogant, and immensely talented. Moss and Owens infuriate a lot of fans, but you see people wearing their jerseys (not that we expect to see anyone wearing a version of MVP's gaudy ring attire on the street anytime soon). But people like bad boys. Just ask Dennis Rodman. So far, MVP is an untapped marketing resource. Give him a micro-

phone, let him develop a catchphrase or two, and people will be throwing down some serious money in MVP gear. But we'll have to see if this really happens. **GRADE: B-**

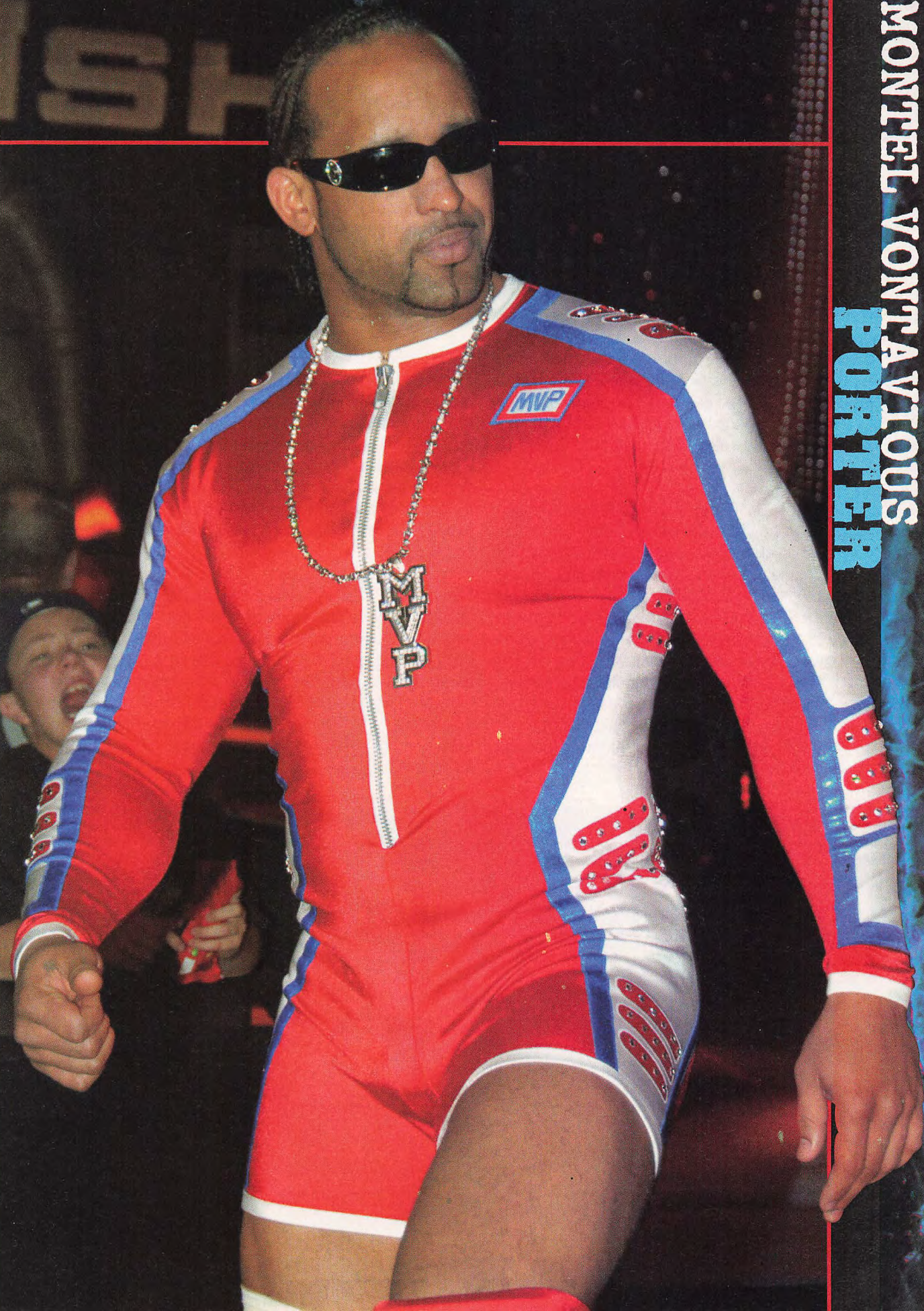
REPERTOIRE: MVP showed a tremendous amount of skill in his matches against Benoit and has demonstrated a technical proficiency few can match. Perhaps even more impressive is that we get the distinct impression that MVP has yet to reveal the full breadth of his skills. His playmaker finisher is unorthodox, but highly effective, and can be executed quickly and at almost any point during a match. In fact, MVP might be better served to follow the example of Jake Roberts and begin using that move earlier in his bouts and secure the win instead of trying to showcase too many moves and leave himself open for an unexpected counter. Just because he has an impressive move set doesn't mean he has to use every move in every match. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: When MVP first appeared on Smackdown, it was hard to understand what Teddy Long saw in him that made his signing such a big deal. After all, while MVP had success on the independent circuit, it was in smaller, less visible promotions than even Ring of Honor or the late WSX. The average fans—and even the wrestling media—didn't know exactly what he brought to Smackdown brand. His first few lackluster months didn't do much to support Long's enthusiasm. As U.S. champion, MVP was poised to become one of Smackdown's top players. Then, at the June 26 taping of Smackdown, Porter lost a non-title match to Kane, who hasn't seemed to be able to beat anyone other than MVP this year. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: If you couldn't tell by now, we think MVP has a world of potential. If he follows his current career trajectory, MVP could very well be competing for the Smackdown World title at WrestleMania 24. He's not yet one of WWE's—well, most valuable players—but he will be soon enough. **GRADE: B**



MONTELL VONTAVIOUS
PORTER



CHRIS SABIN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: It's ironic that Chris Sabin spent a good portion of the past year trying to humiliate Jerry Lynn, when he and Lynn actually have a great deal in common. Both have established themselves as dominant figures in the X division, but were unable to parlay that success in the heavyweight division. Critics have derided both men for having "vanilla" personalities, though few people criticize their in-ring skills. Sabin badly needed a heel turn to reinvigorate his personality and stand out from the pack. He was rewarded with a pair of X division title reigns, making him a four-time X division champion. But it's time for Sabin to do what Lynn was never able to do and take that next step forward.

GRADE: C+

MARKETABILITY: Sabin tried his best to re-make himself as the bad boy of the X division, but Samoa Joe handled him with such relative ease to win the X title that it ruined any marketing headway he might have made with his efforts. At this point, Sabin would be best advised to concentrate on his on-again, off-again tag team with Alex Shelley. Known as The Motor City Machine Guns on the indy circuit, Sabin and Shelley together exhibit the sort of charisma that has largely eluded them as singles. The Machine Guns are reminiscent of the legendary Los Gringos Loco tandem of Art Barr and Eddie Guerrero. At this point, they are much more marketable as a team as than they would be as singles. **GRADE: C+**

REPERTOIRE: Years of experience in the X division have schooled Sabin well in the aerial game, mat wrestling, counter-wrestling, and innovation. He has gone hold-for-hold with Lynn, Christopher Daniels, and A.J. Styles, and few others can say the same. Sabin could stand to add a little more muscle mass, however, to put some added force into his attacks. **GRADE: A-**

CAREER GROWTH: Dropping the X division title might have been a blessing for Sabin. He has shown more versatility and a flashier side of his personality in recent months, and the X division title might have been holding him back. He's not ready to step into the ring with the big boys quite yet, but he's beginning to look a little more like a young Chris Jericho. Being brash and arrogant can help him gain higher-profile matches, especially with the equally arrogant Shelley at his side. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: The X division is a bizarre thing. It has been TNA's trademark and has won over scores of fans with its ultra-athletic style of bouts. At the same time, once fans become conditioned to seeing X division talent as *purely* X division talent, those wrestlers aren't able to elevate themselves to the main-event level. Sabin is on the verge of a breakthrough. When it finally happens, he will be one of TNA's most valuable stars ... but it may be a year or two away. **GRADE: B**



CHRIS
SABIN



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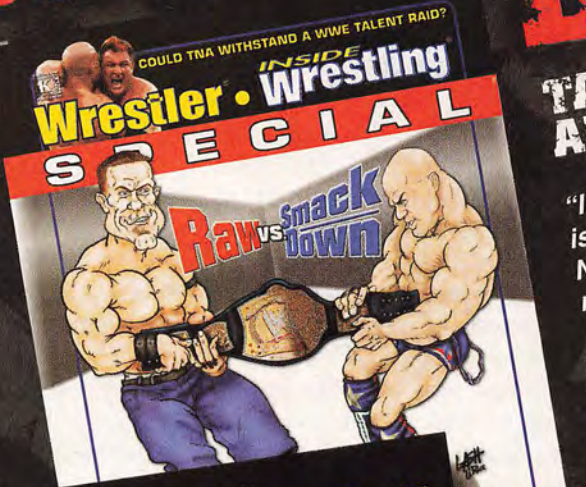
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STING

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Sting came to TNA with an agenda. Of course, he wanted to win the World title, but he wanted more than that. He wanted to help take the company to the next plateau, to share his experience, insight, and spirituality with the TNA locker room. Over the past year, he has done exactly that. His World title reign was brief, but that was largely because Sting became more concerned with helping Abyss reclaim his humanity. If Sting's goal was to establish himself as the top star in TNA, he would get a mediocre grade. But Sting's ultimate goal is to be a mentor and to give back to the business. He has done just that. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: Sting was one of the top draws in wrestling throughout the 1990s. His epic Starrcade 1998 clash against Hulk Hogan was hyped for more than 18 months and ended up being one of the biggest matches of the decade. Sting may be competing in front of smaller audiences in TNA

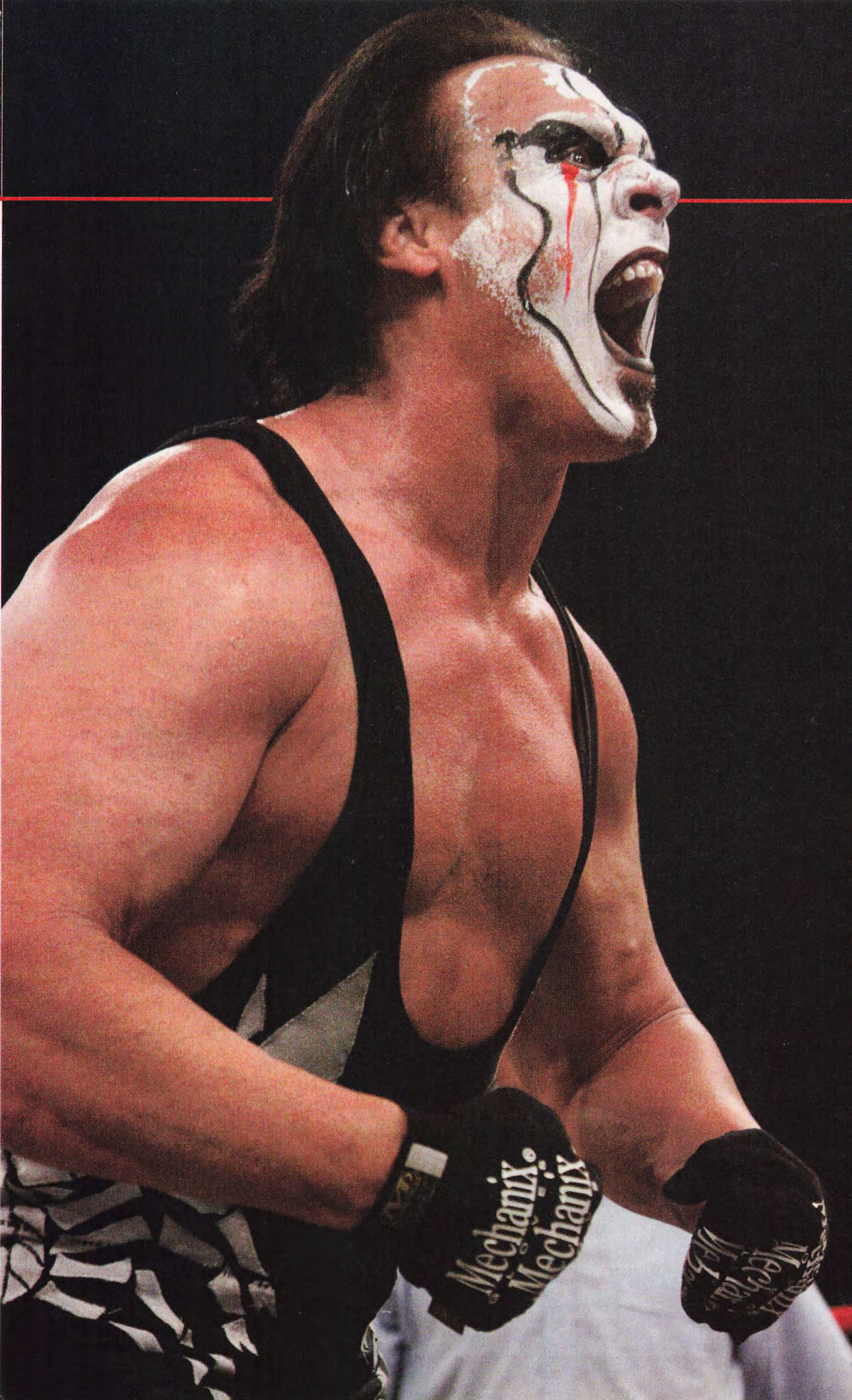
today, but his star quality has not diminished. Sting's name and image still sells tickets, merchandise, and pay-per-views. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Back in 1988, Sting wrestled Ric Flair to a 45-minute draw at the first Clash of the Champions event. Sting largely relied on press slams, suplexes, and moves off the top rope to take the "Nature Boy" to the limit. However, he did manage to show some surprising counter-wrestling skills that showed he was more than the one-dimensional brawler some people thought he was. These days, Sting has scaled back his game. He rarely makes his way up to the top rope and relies almost exclusively on his scorpion deathdrop, scorpion deathlock, and his ever-present baseball bat. His move set has regressed significantly over the years. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Sting is already a bona fide legend in wrestling. There's not much more growth we can truly expect out of him. However, the Sting of old could have put forth some Match of the Year-caliber efforts against stars such as Kurt Angle and Samoa Joe. We still have not seen Sting's best efforts in TNA. Until he shows that same competitive spark in TNA that was his hallmark in WCW, we have to give him a less-than-perfect grade. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Just having Sting on the roster has been a boon to TNA. He has helped the company establish credibility and has also guided some (but by no means all) of the disenfranchised former WCW fans to TNA on Spike TV. However, the rise of Samoa Joe and the signing of Kurt Angle have lowered Sting's stock a bit. Sting no longer stands out as the heir apparent to the World title. He's still a valuable piece of the puzzle, but he's no longer the focal point of the company. **GRADE: B**





STING



JAMES STORM

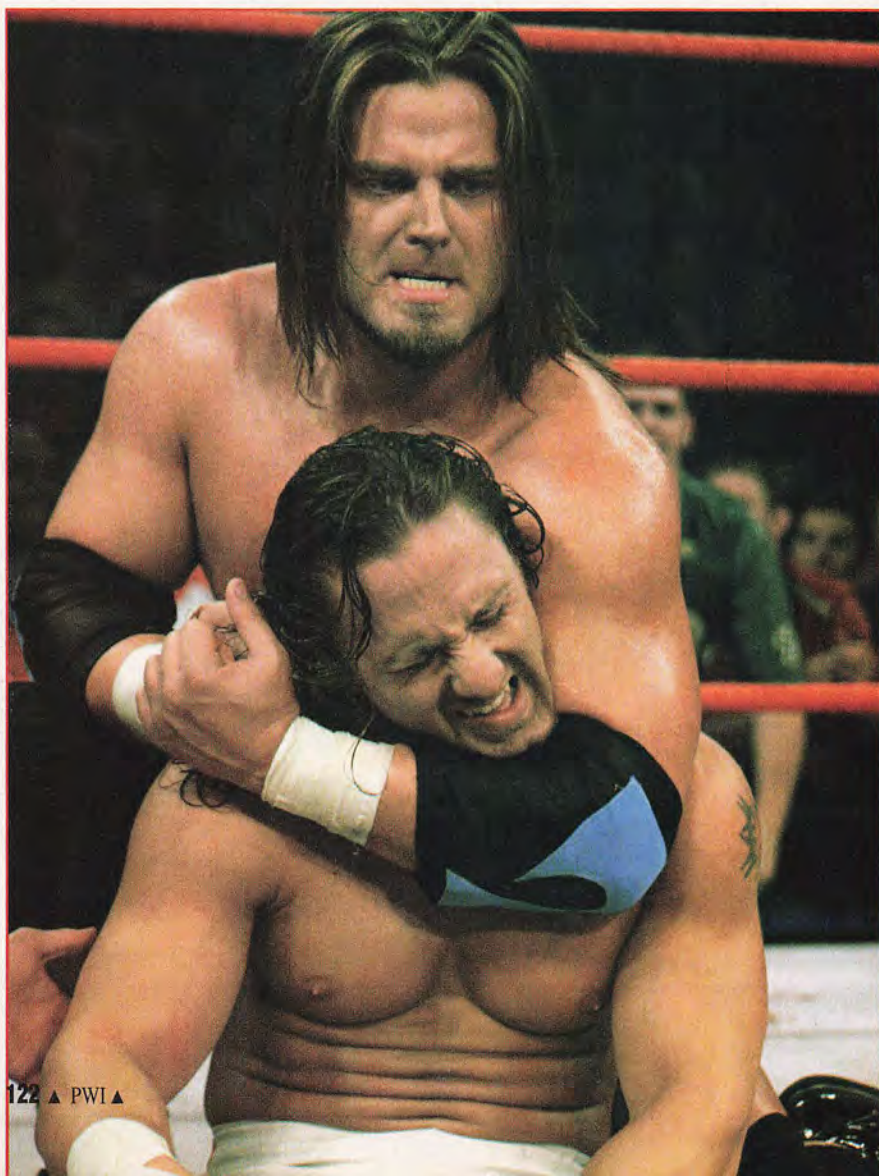
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When an established tag team breaks apart, one of the two competitors often has far greater success as a singles competitor than his former partner. In other words, for every Shawn Michaels, there is a Marty Jannetty. For every Scott Steiner, there is a Rick Steiner. For every Booker T, there is a Stevie Ray. You get the point. When America's Most Wanted finally split last December, we have to admit it: We thought Chris Harris would be the more successful of the two. And while Harris might have bested the "Tennessee Cowboy" at Sacrifice, it was Storm who was getting national recognition for his mini-feud with Frank Wycheck of the Tennessee Titans. For a guy who seemed somewhat bland as part of AMW, this beer-swilling redneck has blossomed into one of the most entertaining wrestlers in TNA. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Storm isn't at the main-event level, but he's definitely on the rise. And he's slowly gaining respect for his barroom brawling style. Plus, fans tend to cheer for guys who drink beer a lot—from Steve Austin to The Sandman to the APA ... we wonder why that is. **GRADE: B-**

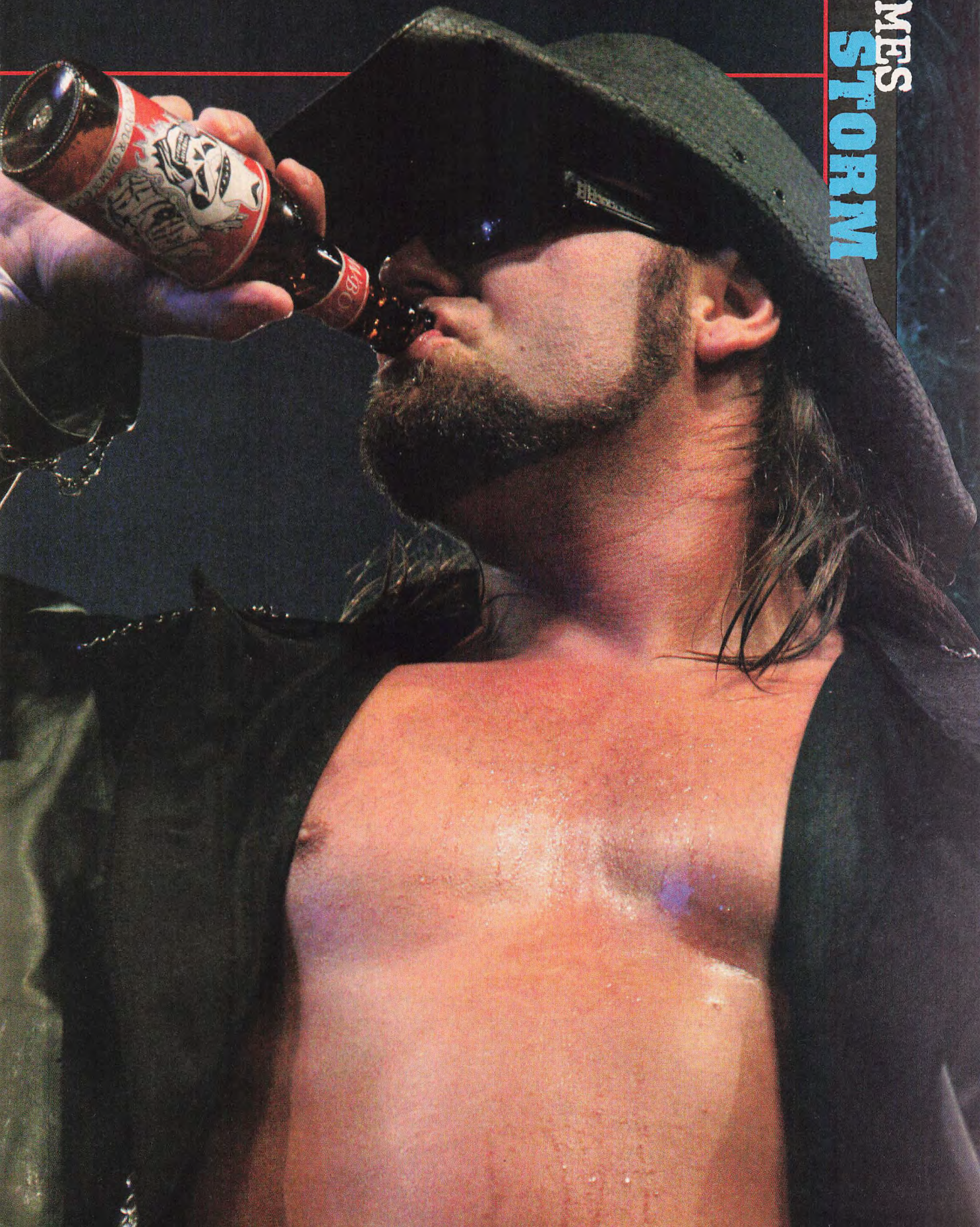
REPERTOIRE: The bulldog is a move that never seems to get respect these days. When properly executed, it can mean the end of a match. Storm puts all of his 225 pounds into his version of the bulldog, and it has been extremely effective for him. His superkick is also impressive, as he shows great flexibility and timing, often nailing much taller opponents right on the chin. His mat wrestling still leaves a lot to be desired, however, and the top rope might as well be a foreign country as far as he's concerned. **GRADE: C+**

CAREER GROWTH: Storm may be sore about coming out on the losing end of his feud with Chris Harris, but it's not really that important in the overall scheme. Storm is finally on his own and building a name for himself. AMW accomplished all they could, and there are plenty of new frontiers for Storm as a singles star. An X division title reign—though unexpected—certainly wouldn't be out of the question. **GRADE: B+**

OVERALL VALUE: Much like Bobby Roode, Storm's greatest value is that he is establishing himself as a solid mid-card competitor who has the potential to make it to the next level. He is one of just a handful of home-grown mid-carders in TNA. As his epic bloodbath against Harris proved, he's also capable of wrestling some great matches. Guys like Storm are the future of TNA. **GRADE: B**



JAMES
STORM



TEAM 3D

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Back in the 1980s, The Road Warriors would frequently embark on a Japanese tour whenever they needed a change of scenery from the NWA. These trips to the other side of the globe helped revitalize Hawk and Animal. When they returned to the NWA, they were more dangerous than ever. Team 3D took a page from the LOD playbook last fall, winning the HUSTLE Super tag team title. By the time they returned to TNA, they had rediscovered their killer instinct. Frankly, they needed all the killer instinct they could muster because The Latin American Exchange gave them some of the most hellacious battles of their career. At Lockdown, Team 3D became the first team in history to win the WWE, ECW, WCW, and NWA tag titles. It wasn't easy, but Team 3D's already incredible resume became complete that night. **GRADE: A-**

MARKETABILITY: We're not sure whether Brother Ray and Brother Devon are truly one of the greatest teams of all-time (they have lost an awful lot of matches to some pretty non-remarkable teams through the years), but no one can deny their success. A decade after they routinely instigated near-riots in

ECW, they are one of the most popular teams in the sport. Just scan the audience at the Impact Zone to see all the Team 3D shirts and listen to the pop they get once D-Von grabs that table. **GRADE: B+**

REPERTOIRE: The good ol' 3D is still one of the most reliable finishers in the sport, and one that Brother Ray and Brother Devon can hit suddenly and without a lot of setup. But, after all these years, the brothers from different mothers haven't added all that much to their game. The Road Warriors didn't change their game too much, but they almost always enjoyed a strength advantage over their opponents. Team 3D doesn't enjoy that same advantage. The other great teams—The British Bulldogs, The Hart Foundation, The Midnight Express, The Steiners, and so many others—were constantly adding new moves to their arsenal. Team 3D is growing stale. **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Team 3D finally won the last major tag team championship that had eluded them. Now the former Dudleys are looking to secure their legacy by defending the TNA World tag team belts against The Steiners and any other comers. You have to give them credit: Ray and Devon are always looking for new worlds to conquer. But how many new worlds are left? **GRADE: B+**

OVERALL VALUE:

Team 3D is the backbone of the TNA tag team division. They also have the name recognition and overall talent to headline an occasional PPV, such as Victory Road. Despite all their success, they remain hungry and dangerous. If they really are dedicated to cementing their legacy, we should be in for some great tag matches in the coming months.

GRADE: B



TEAM
3D



BATISTA

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Some mighty big holes have popped up in the aura of invincibility Batista created during his early days in Evolution. It all started when Batista had to relinquish the Smackdown World title due to injuries. Then there was his well-publicized backstage brawl with Booker T that reportedly saw Booker get the upper hand on "The Animal" before it was broken up. When Batista returned from his injuries, he seemed a half-step slower and more tentative. He eventually regained the title by beating Booker, but he struggled in the effort. He struggled against Ken Kennedy at the Royal Rumble, lost to The Undertaker at 'Mania, and failed to top UT in rematches. He has also struggled against Edge, a man he would have

dominated a year or two ago. Even with a Smackdown World title reign to his credit, he has slumped this year.

GRADE: C+

MARKETABILITY: Batista falls into the Goldberg mold of fan favorites. He's a dominating force who speaks no more than necessary and almost always in calm tones. His in-ring intensity is kept in check by his cool, laidback demeanor outside the ring, which is appealing. Batista knows when it's time to "unleash the Animal" and when it's time to style and profile. He carries himself with class and confidence, and that helps him in the popularity department. Constantly being talked up by Ric Flair doesn't hurt, either. **GRADE: B+**

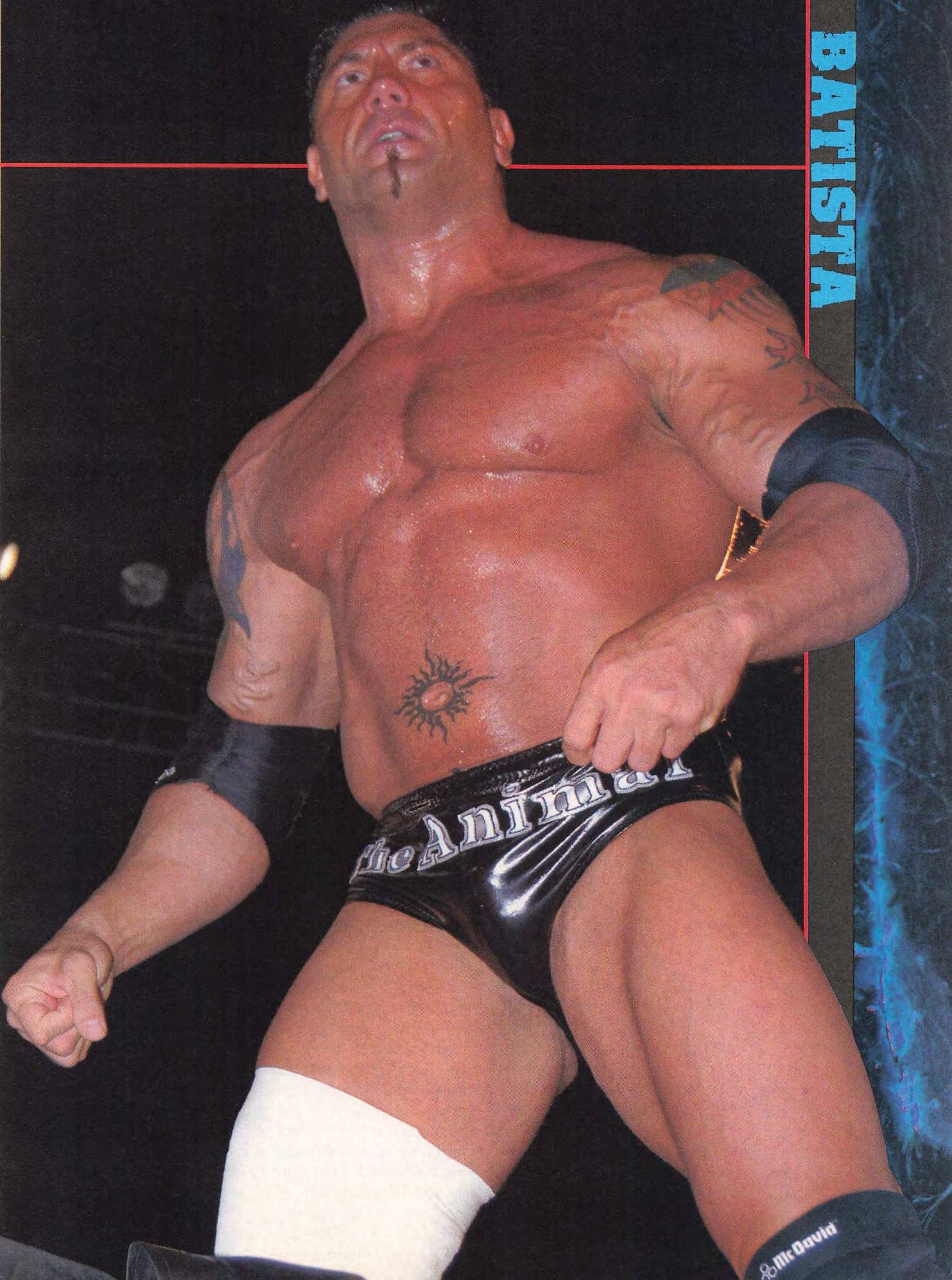
REPERTOIRE: This is the area in which Batista needs the most improvement. While Batista raised his intensity level against Undertaker and at times overpowered 'Taker, he was defenseless against 'Taker's striking game. For most of his career, Batista has enjoyed a strength advantage, and that has made him complacent. Why develop submission skills, take-downs, and finesse moves when you're big enough to pick guys up and simply throw them around the ring? That is why Batista struggles against wrestlers who can match his strength (Undertaker, Mark Henry) or those savvy enough to avoid his power assault and keep him on the defensive with precision attacks (Edge, Booker). **GRADE: C**

CAREER GROWTH: Batista is still the heir-apparent to the Smackdown crown, but he must work harder to rebuild his image as a dominant force. To do that, he needs to score some decisive wins over Edge. If he can do that, he will need to show his stuff against 'Taker and against new Smackdown arrival The Great Khali. He's on the verge of a major rebound, but questions persist. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Batista is in a position where he possibly can beat Edge for the Smackdown World title and settle in to a very lengthy World championship reign. But to realize such lofty aspirations, he needs to stay healthy, he needs to recognize his shortcomings and act upon them, and he needs to reassert his dominance. If that happens, he'll be tremendously valuable ... but he hasn't done that yet. It's possible that Edge won't allow it to happen. **GRADE: B-**



BATISTA



THE BOOGEYMAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The man who took makeup tips from Darth Maul came back from a shoulder injury, broke more clocks over his head, ate a whole bunch more worms, and introduced a mini sidekick. He also offered to get Donald Trump a worm sandwich at WrestleMania, for what that's worth. The Boogeyman isn't so much a title contender as he is an attraction. His job is to pump up the fans with a cool entrance and shove a gob-full of worms down a despised wrestler's

throat. He's back, he's healthy, and he's doing his thing—you can't really ask for much more from him. **GRADE: A**

MARKETABILITY: The Boogeyman might have been the biggest winner in the 2007 draft. It's no secret that the Sci Fi Channel wanted ECW to add a science fiction element to its programming to fit in with the other shows on the network, hence ECW introduced a zombie (in its debut show) and a vampire in Kevin Thorn. Boogeyman meets that "Sci Fi" criteria better than anyone. After all, he does hail from "The Bottomless Pit." Who knows? If Boogey can spike ratings for ECW, maybe Sci Fi will give him his own spinoff show. Is that really crazier than TNT developing a made-for-TV movie for "Diamond" Dallas Page a few years back? **GRADE: B+**

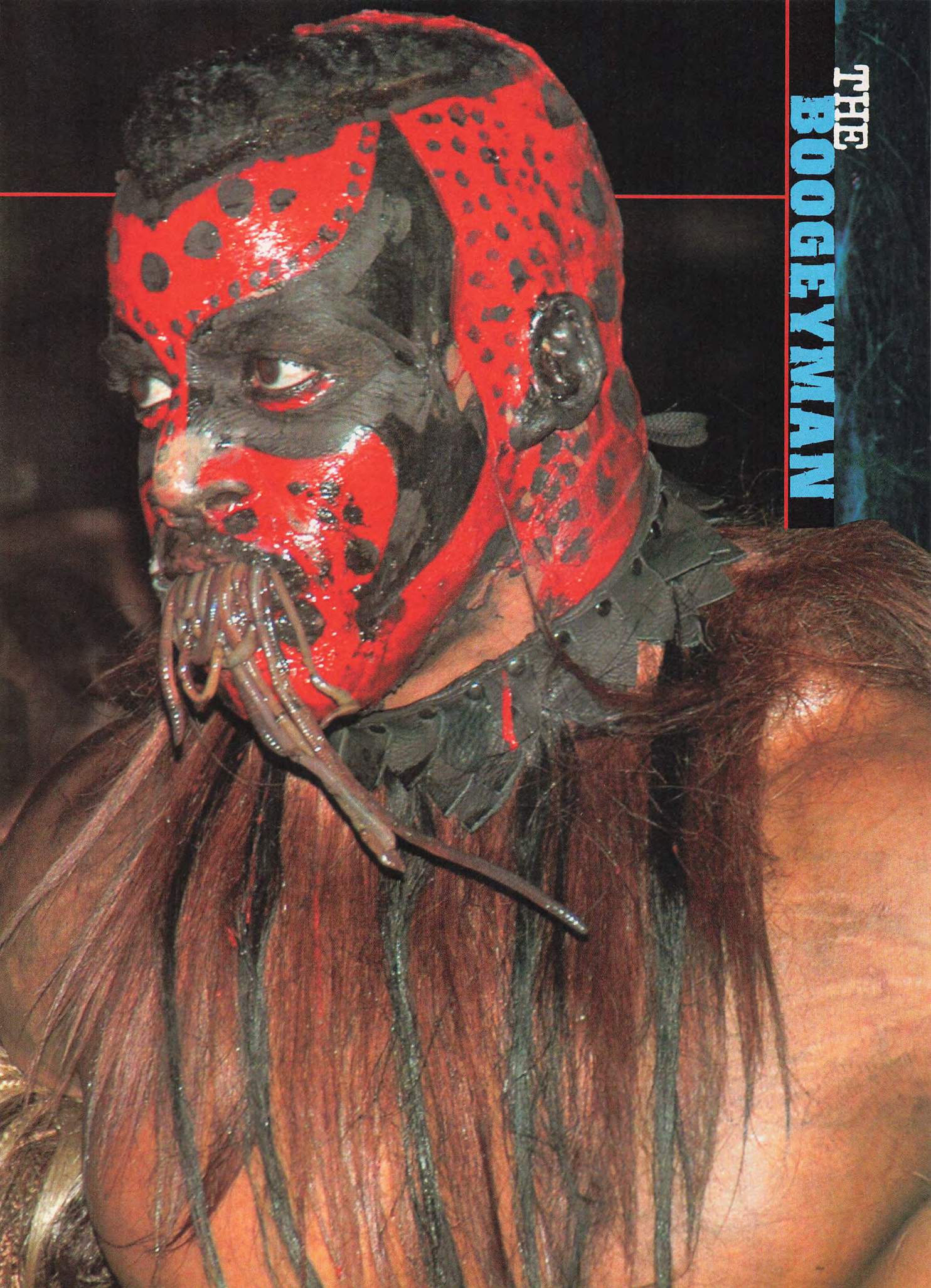
REPERTOIRE: If you look past the worms, the facepaint, the smoking staff, and all those feathers, you'll see that Boogeyman has a very impressive physique. His raw strength often gets overlooked, which is by design. Boogeyman wants his opponents to be distracted by all of his accoutrements so he can quickly overwhelm them with a power attack. Boogeyman has been very effective against the wrestlers who let the worms and smoke get to them. He needs to spend less time developing psychological weapons and more time learning new moves. Other than his tree-slam and chokeslam, Boogeyman's arsenal doesn't have much to offer. **GRADE: D**

CAREER GROWTH: While it seemed almost ludicrous to consider the prospect of Boogey winning the Smackdown World title, it doesn't seem quite so out of the question for him to win the ECW title. There is less competition in ECW, and that translates into greater opportunity for a guy like The Boogeyman. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: There's an old adage in wrestling: To be a successful promoter, you have to give the fans a little bit of everything. That means you need competitive and compelling title bouts. You need a women's match or two. You need super heavyweights, you need lightweights. And you need entertainers. The Boogeyman nicely fills that sort of comic relief role. He's popular with the kids and is usually good for a decent promo and a few laughs. Put it this way: Cosmo Kramer might not have been able to carry his own sitcom, but *Seinfeld* wouldn't have been nearly as good if he wasn't around. **GRADE: B-**



THE BOOGYMAN



CHRISTOPHER DANIELS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Last year, Christopher Daniels gave us a lot of grief for his scores on his Report Card. He said we weren't being fair, and that it wasn't his fault that the TNA matchmakers weren't giving him opportunities for the World title. At Slammiversary, the "Fallen Angel" got his chance to take a huge step up in the standings, provided he could

beat Sting. Instead, Sting needed just six minutes to decisively defeat his would-be protégé. Daniels is running out of excuses. Someone with his talent should be achieving more than occasional tag championships and brief, sporadic X division title runs. **GRADE: B-**

MARKETABILITY: The "Fallen Angel" is one of the most unique characters in the game. He's a compelling performer, whether he's wrestling as a fan favorite or a rulebreaker. He's also one of the most fluid wrestlers in the sport, and one of the best promo men anywhere. Daniels can sell plenty of T-shirts and DVDs, but he still needs to prove he's a top-level competitor and not a talented mid-card guy who gets lucky once in a while. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Daniels has been a shining beacon of technical wrestling ability and innovation for years. His battles with Samoa Joe last year forced him to dig even deeper just to survive. Daniels has slowed a bit in the past year, first concentrating on tag team wrestling with A.J. Styles and then wrestling a rougher, more brawling style. Daniels is showing less of his superior technical skills these days. Nothing is more disappointing to a teacher than a star pupil who under-performs. His grade reflects that. **GRADE: B-**

CAREER GROWTH: It actually looked as if Daniels was going to get a chance to engage in a long rivalry with Sting. But, after that lopsided loss at Slammiversary, Daniels' stock has dropped. Sting is ready to move on to the next challenge, and Daniels is reeling. He may need a change of scenery. Maybe another tour of Japan is in order, or maybe he should introduce TNA fans to his spicy alter ego, Curry Man. The next step he takes will be the most important of his career. **GRADE: C+**

OVERALL VALUE: We're still very high on Christopher Daniels. He can seamlessly move from tag team division to the X division to the heavyweight division. He has a passionate following, routinely wrestles some of the best matches of the show, and cuts some of the most passionate and engaging promos in the business, but he's been in his comfort zone far too long. Unless he breaks out of his rut, one of the most unique and talented competitors around today runs the risk of becoming just another mid-card wrestler. Daniels cannot allow that to happen to him. **GRADE: B-**



CHRISTOPHER
DANIELS



JEFF JARRETT

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: For the past two years, Jeff Jarrett has had much more pressing concerns than the TNA World title. On May 23, his wife, Jill Jarrett, lost her fight with cancer. Jeff, understandably, has been devastated by his wife's passing, and his career has taken a backseat. Jarrett's candid pre-taped interview at Slammiversary was one of the most touching and emotional moments ever in wrestling, and it was a moving tribute to a woman Jarrett clearly adored. Given the circumstances of the past year, there's no way we can grade his achievement in the ring when his focus was on something far greater. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

MARKETABILITY: For the first time in years, Jarrett has allowed himself to come across as a sympathetic character. He has always been more comfortable playing the cocky heel. He has finally dropped that rulebreaking façade and allowed the real Jeff Jarrett to shine through. If Jarrett stays true to his word and is willing to dedicate himself to helping TNA grow rather than to keeping his stranglehold on the World title, he can become one of TNA's most beloved wrestlers. He's in the midst of one of the most unlikely transformations ever. **GRADE: A**

REPERTOIRE: Jarrett's style is outdated, especially when X division competitors are constantly com-

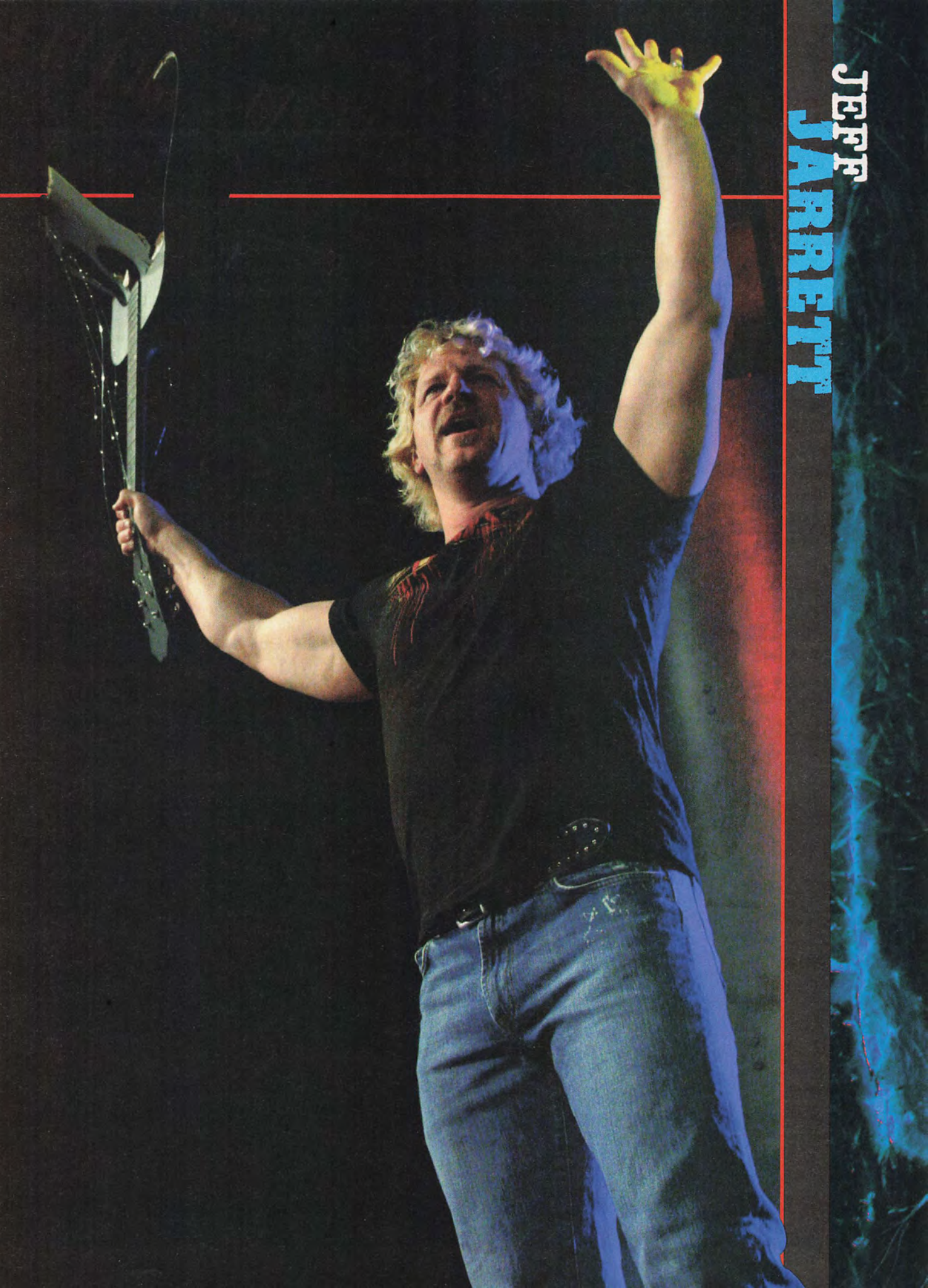
ing up with exciting new moves. A Jeff Jarrett match in 2007 looks exactly the same in 2007 as it did in 1997 and 1987. Jarrett really needs to ditch the guitar once and for all and come up with something other than the stroke as his finishing maneuver. **GRADE: C-**

CAREER GROWTH: If Jarrett is ready to "give back" to wrestling as he says he is, then perhaps he's ready to raise his game to a new level. There comes a time when a wrestler has to become concerned about his legacy. Jarrett has won dozens of titles in his career, but almost all of them have come through underhanded means. If Jarrett were to retire today, he would be remembered as a talented, though largely undeserving champion. If Jarrett is ready to put more emphasis on clean and competitive matches, then—win or lose—he can add a new chapter to his legacy. **GRADE: B**

OVERALL VALUE: Without Jeff Jarrett, there would be no TNA. That point cannot be understated. But Jarrett brings a southern, gimmick-laden Memphis-style influence to TNA, something a lot of people compare to WCW during that company's dying days. In the end, though, Jarrett helps TNA more than he hurts TNA. And if he's ready to change his style for the better, he'll help even more. **GRADE: B-**



JEFF
JARRETT



GAIL KIM

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Poor Gail Kim. Despite being one of the most genuinely talented women to set foot in the ring over the past decade, she has never had a sustained run as a primary player in a women's division. She won the WWE women's title in her TV debut with that company back in 2003, but dropped the title to Molly Holly less than a month later. After spending the past two years wrestling part-time on the indy circuit, Kim has established herself as one of the most prominent women in TNA. Kim is hearing cheers from the fans and faring well against Jackie Moore and Traci Brooks, but she is being badly underutilized by the company. **GRADE: B-**

MARKETABILITY: At the onset of every edition of *Impact*, a baritone voice intones: "This is TNA. We are wrestling." Yet one of the most impressive female wrestlers in the sport is usually relegated to playing the role of eye candy. Certainly, Kim is an extremely attractive woman, and the company can sell plenty of glossy 8x10s and Knockouts DVDs featuring her, but Kim is most marketable as a superior *wrestler* and not just another pretty face. How many so-called divas can execute flying headscissors takedowns into cradle pins? The more you limit Kim's time spent wrestling—not just catfighting—in the ring, the more you're damaging her marketability. **GRADE: C+**

REPERTOIRE: Kim owes a great deal of her offensive repertoire to her lucha libre influences. She has tremendous balance and foot speed, and the catlike reflexes to execute moves that very few of her male competitors can match. Kim has some spectacular moves in her arsenal, such as her huracanrana combinations, her flying crossbody, and her flying headscissors takedown into an armbar. She also has several submission holds at her disposal, including the dragon sleeper and a formidable Texas cloverleaf. What many people fail to notice, however, is her mastery of the basic armdrag. She gets such great depth and force into an armdrag that she simultaneously weakens the arm while taking her opponent down. That leaves her in a perfect position to utilize the variety of armbars and keylocks she often uses to gain the submission. Pay close attention to a Gail Kim match and you'll learn a pure wrestling lesson. **GRADE: A+**

CAREER GROWTH: Kim went from being jeered to cheered, but without a women's title in TNA, she's still stuck in limbo. After her current feud with Brooks ends, what's left for her? So Cal Val? **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Perhaps this isn't the most flattering of metaphors, but Kim is like a thoroughbred stuck pulling a rickety old carriage. Kim is a good model. She's a lousy interview subject. But she's a spectacular wrestler. Ultimately, she is valuable only in that capacity and she's not a full-time wrestler. **GRADE: B-**



GAIT
HIM



ROBERT ROODE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: After being the subject of the largest managerial free-for-all since Oliver Humperdink signed Bam Bam Bigelow, Robert Roode has gone on to ... lose a feud to Eric Young? When Jim Cornette forced Team Canada to disband, Roode seemed to have the most potential as a singles competitor. He reinvented himself as a wealthy investor. He adopted new ring gear, a robe with more than a passing resemblance to one that TNA Director of Talent Relations Terry Taylor used to wear, and hired Traci Brooks as his new manager. But Brooks made a crucial strategic error by being more concerned about winning Young's contract than winning titles. His struggles against Young, culminating in his loss to "Showtime" at Lockdown, have dropped him out of World title contention. Not good for such a highly touted "free agent." **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: At times, Roode seems to be trying his absolute hardest to channel the spirits of Rick Rude and Curt Hennig. His current persona seems to be a hybrid between those two legends. While those are admirable competitors to emulate, Roode comes across as a pale imitation. He's slowly improving and is developing into a strong promo man, but he still has a ways to go. Working as a heel won't help him sell much merchandise, either. **GRADE: B-**

REPERTOIRE: Roode likes to concentrate his attacks on one body part, typically the back or neck, which he weakens with his vicious lariat, his neck-breaker, or his spinning power bomb. Once he can see an opponent's shoulders begin to sag in fatigue, he usually goes for his fisherman's suplex for the win.

However, all too often, Roode showboats before hooking his opponent's leg with that maneuver, often giving his opponent a chance to grab an inside cradle for a possible pinfall. Roode wrestles a sound tactical game, but is prone to mental errors. That should change with experience. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: Roode has successfully reinvented himself since his Team Canada days, meticulously crafting a new persona that has star quality and appeal. But how Roode recovers from his frustrations over the Young situation will go a long way toward showing what the future holds for him. If he can regroup and mount another winning streak (perhaps getting revenge against Jeff Jarrett), Roode could become a true singles threat again in the very near future. If he continues to falter, the hot free agent will look a lot more like Ryan Leaf than Peyton Manning. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: Roode has the potential to become TNA's first true homegrown heavyweight contender. Sting, Kurt Angle, Christian Cage, Jarrett, and so many others were successful before they arrived in TNA. It would be great if company officials could point to Roode as a guy who made his name in TNA. He could be quite valuable if he ever gets his priorities in order. **GRADE: B-**



ROBERT
ROODE



MICKIE JAMES

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: It has been a frustrating year for Mickie James. At WrestleMania 22, she lived her dream by beating her idol, Trish Stratus, for the WWE women's title. At WrestleMania 23, she was reduced to the role of "lumberjill," standing at ringside and watching Melina defend the championship against Ashley Massaro. While still a staple of the women's division. James has slipped from a leading role to a supporting role. It was an unfortunate step backward for the former champion. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Mickie's excitement is infectious, from the moment she bounces up the entranceway to when she takes control of the match, using high-speed attacks to dizzy her adversaries. We can't help but think, had Mickie decided to take off her clothes for *Playboy* this spring, she would have received the title shot against Melina at WrestleMania. It's a shame that athleticism takes a back seat to exhi-

bitionism in today's WWE, but it's a sad fact. Mickie will always appeal to wrestling's purists, but she'll always have to take a backseat to the Divas willing to show a little more skin. **GRADE: C+**

REPERTOIRE: James had to raise her game last year to take the championship away from Stratus, and she did just that. Over the past year, Mickie has improved her game even further, adding a gorgeous fisherman's suplex, a devastating hanging neckbreaker, and a huracanrana from the turnbuckles. Mickie's offense is explosive. Her low center of gravity is an asset on defense as she rolls through suplexes and slams to better disburse the impact and minimize the effect of high-impact moves. As far as her repertoire goes, Mickie is the most well-rounded woman in WWE. **GRADE: A**

CAREER GROWTH: Mickie has slipped a notch in the rankings, falling behind Ashley and Candice

Michelle. To her credit, Mickie has remained upbeat and positive, and frequently steals the show when she teams with other Divas on Raw. She has shown remarkable patience and resilience, and we get the feeling she'll have another run as women's champion as soon as she gets an opportunity. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: About seven years ago, Ivory was WWE's most technically sound female competitor. After Ivory, it was Molly Holly. Then Trish Stratus took the mantle of best pure wrestler in the women's division. Victoria assumed the role briefly, and now it's Mickie James who is the company's best technical wrestler. While Melina and Candice are getting the most attention, Mickie is the true backbone of the women's division. **GRADE: C+**



MICKIE
JAMES



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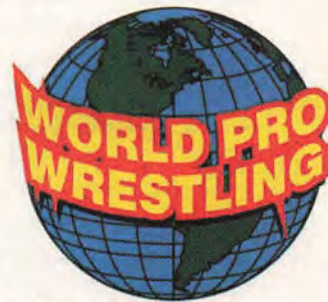
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THE GREAT KHALI

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: So far, only two men have been able to eke out victories over The Great Khali—John Cena and The Undertaker. Certainly, there's no shame in losing to either of those competitors, particularly for Khali, who is still a relative newcomer to wrestling. But, really, how much does his incredible winning streak mean if he is unable to win a world championship? Fair or unfair, we hold wrestling's giants to a higher standard than their shorter peers. Given Khali's incredible physical gifts, anything less than a world championship reign has to be considered a disappointment. Khali made it to the main-event level, but ultimately the big man came up short. **GRADE: B**

MARKETABILITY: Believe it or not, The Great Khali has some real marketing potential. He may be a one-dimensional power wrestler who is mostly unable to speak English, but he's also the most unique-looking competitor in WWE. Khali stands out in a crowd. He captures attention. Take, for instance, his role in *The Longest Yard*. Khali made moviegoers take notice, based on sheer size alone. Khali is never going to be the draw that Andre the Giant was, but—if promoted and marketed properly—he will always attract a

curious crowd, and that can translate into marketing dollars ... if not T-shirt sales. **GRADE: B**

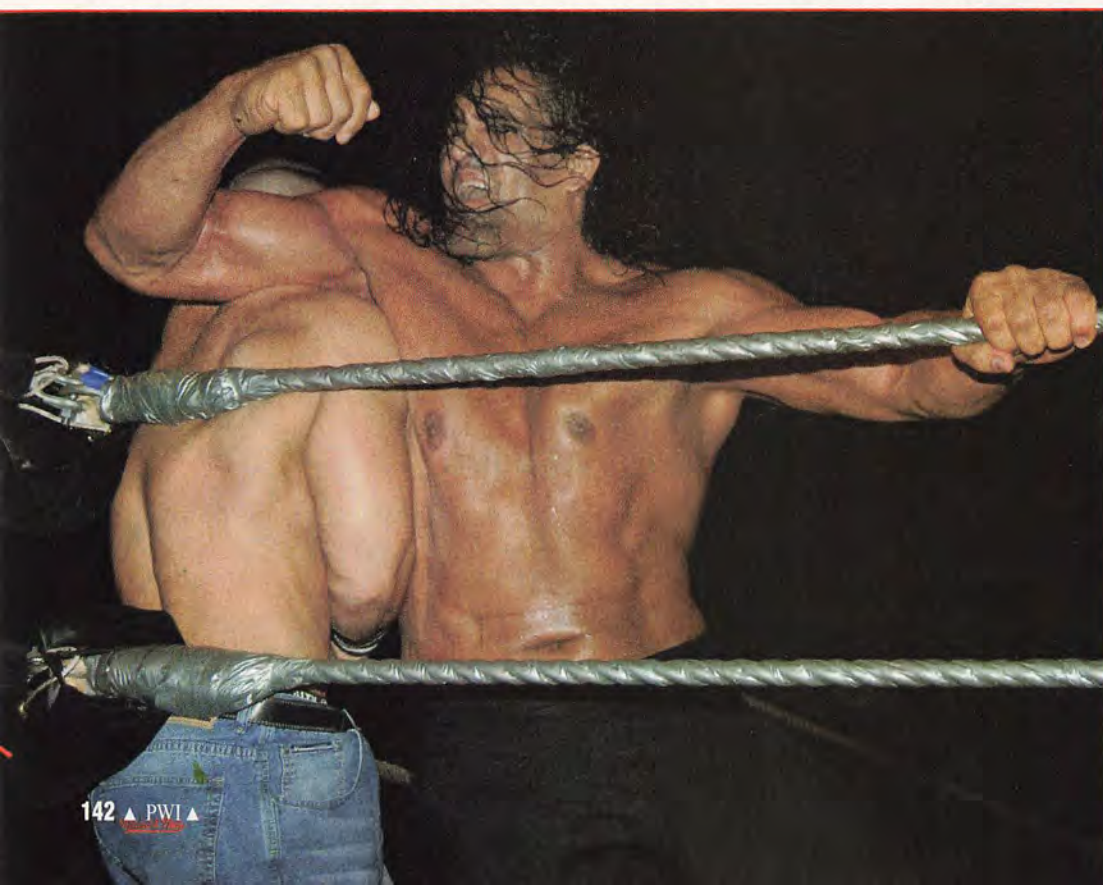
REPERTOIRE: Last year, this was how we assessed The Great Khali's repertoire: "Chop to the head, stomp to the chest, chokeslam. Congratulations. You've now seen a Great Khali match." We've seen a *little* more out of him since then in terms of clotheslines, shoulderblocks, and his two-handed chokeslam. But Khali will never be confused with Lou Thesz. **GRADE: D**

CAREER GROWTH: It seemed pretty unremarkable at the time, but it looks like Khali made a great decision by parting with manager Daivari and hiring his own personal interpreter. Without Daivari stirring up trouble, Khali was able to plot his own course, rather than engage in feuds that didn't advance him toward a world championship. He actually kept a fairly low profile following his victory over Kane at WrestleMania before destroying all the competition and essentially declaring himself the top contender to the Raw World title. For the first time since his WWE debut, Khali showed he had a strategy, and he was rewarded with a string of main-event matches. He even pinned Cena on network television!

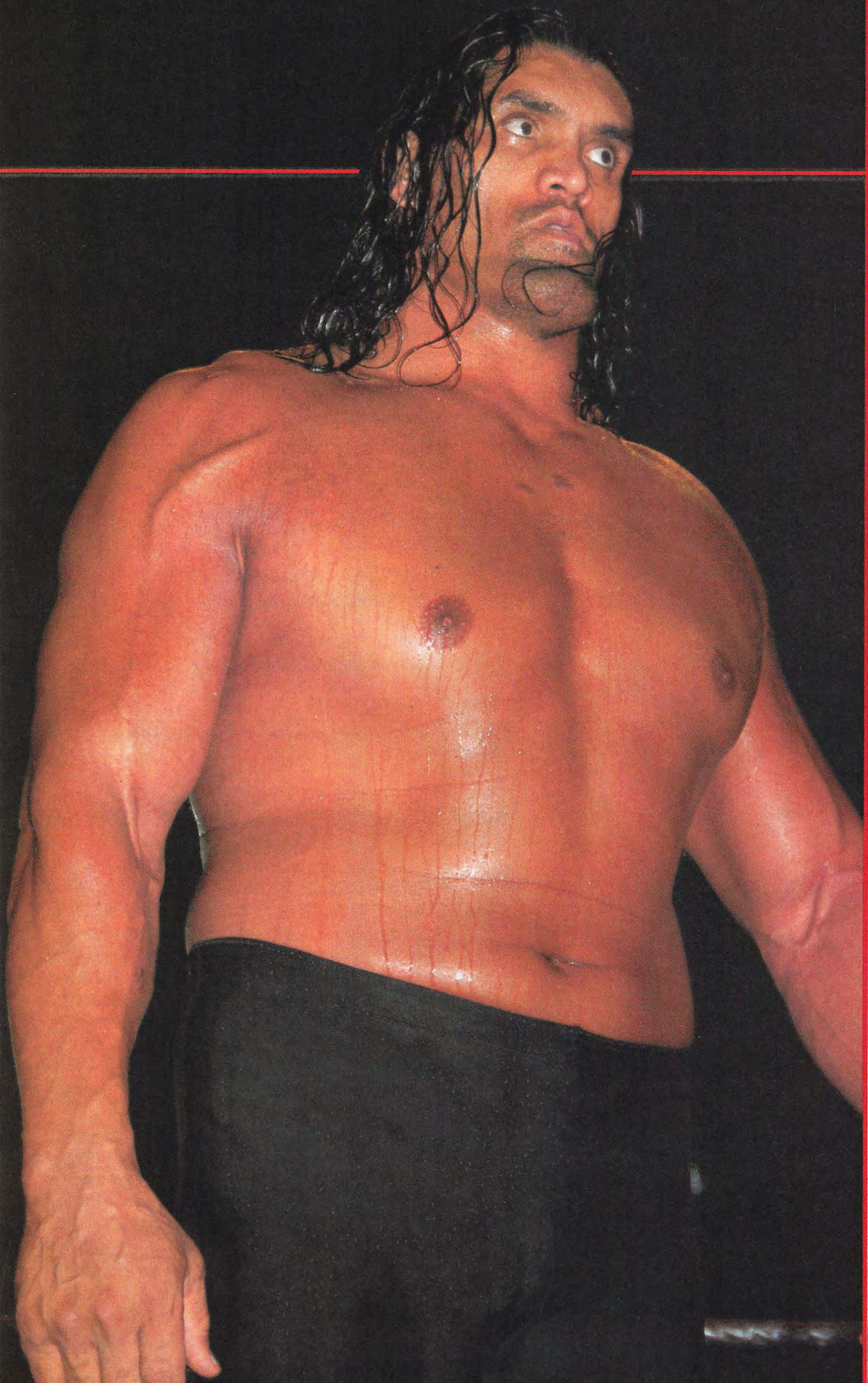
GRADE: B+

OVERALL VALUE:

When Khali was dealt from Raw to Smack-down in the draft lottery, it immediately put the rest of the Smack-down roster on notice. Khali is the kind of guy everyone else in the locker room keeps one eye on at all times. If he were to leave WWE tomorrow, the promotion wouldn't be strapped to find title contenders, but a lot of people would certainly rest easier. He's a major threat anywhere he goes. **GRADE: C+**



THE GREAT
KHALI



CARLITO

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Rarely has a competitor born with such natural gifts done so little with them. The son of Puerto Rican legend Carlos Colon, Carlito began training to wrestle from the day he learned to walk. In his first match on Smackdown in 2004, he beat John Cena to win the U.S. title. When he was dealt to Raw in 2005, he won the Intercontinental title in his first match on that brand by beating Shelton Benjamin. Several months ago, Ric Flair challenged Carlito to take that next step, get serious, and finally live up to his potential. For a while, it looked like Carlito was going to take Flair's words to heart. But when Flair's advice didn't pay imme-

diate rewards, Carlito cracked. Just as it looked like he was finally going to take a step forward, he took two steps backward. **GRADE: C-**

MARKETABILITY: When Carlito debuted in WWE, he was cocky, loud, and strangely charismatic, spitting apple chunks at anyone he deemed to be "uncool." Three years have gone by, though, and Carlito's apple-spitting shtick has grown stale. Carlos Colon was the biggest wrestling star in Puerto Rican history. Carlito is the prince who is poised to inherit the empire. But, just like Flair said, Carlito lacks the focus to take the next step. He has the potential to be a sensation. Today, he's just another aimless rulebreaker. **GRADE: C**

REPERTOIRE: During his time under Flair's tutelage, Carlito began exhibiting some of the skills we knew he had but had always suppressed. His springboard leaps off the second turnbuckle are a thing of beauty, but he rarely uses those moves these days. Carlito is frustrated these days and usually sets up his backstabber finisher with basic kicks and punches. It's yet another example of Carlito letting his skills go to waste. **GRADE: B**

CAREER GROWTH: As much as Carlito seemed to squander the time he spent with Flair, there's a possibility his rulebreaking turn may finally lead to a breakthrough. For Carlito to step up to the main-event level, however, he needs to focus on capturing a world title. The time for silly feuds and misplaced priorities (such as relationships with Trish Stratus and Torrie Wilson) has passed. In a lot of ways, Carlito is where Randy Orton was one year ago. Orton has developed a killer instinct. Carlito still needs to. You would have thought he would have learned that from Flair. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: It may seem like we're being a little hard on Carlito. After all, he's still young, and he's a perennial Intercontinental title contender. But we expect much more out of Carlito than a handful of secondary titles. Carlito's a one-of-a-kind talent, but he's stuck in a dime-a-dozen mid-card rut. He needs to break out soon. **GRADE: C**



CARLITO



CHRIS HARRIS

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: "Wildcat" Chris Harris first emerged as a World title contender in 2004 while his America's Most Wanted partner, James Storm, was sidelined with injuries. Harris enjoyed that first taste of singles success, and, once Harris split with Storm, he was anxious to get back in line for World title shots. Three years can be an eternity in wrestling, however. The time Harris spent as a main-eventer in 2004 has been forgotten by many fans and matchmakers. He has to prove himself all over again. Having struggled as much as he did in matches against Storm didn't help his cause. His inclusion in the "King Of The Mountain" match at Slammiversary was almost an afterthought, and he was the clear underdog in the bout. He might have main-event potential, but he isn't seen as a main-event talent. **GRADE: B-**

MARKETABILITY: Unlike Storm, Harris hasn't done much to reinvent himself as a singles wrestler. He looks and wrestles almost exactly the same as he did as part of AMW. Harris has a relatively generic look and comes across as bland in interviews. In a company filled with flashy characters, Harris fails to stand out. **GRADE: C**

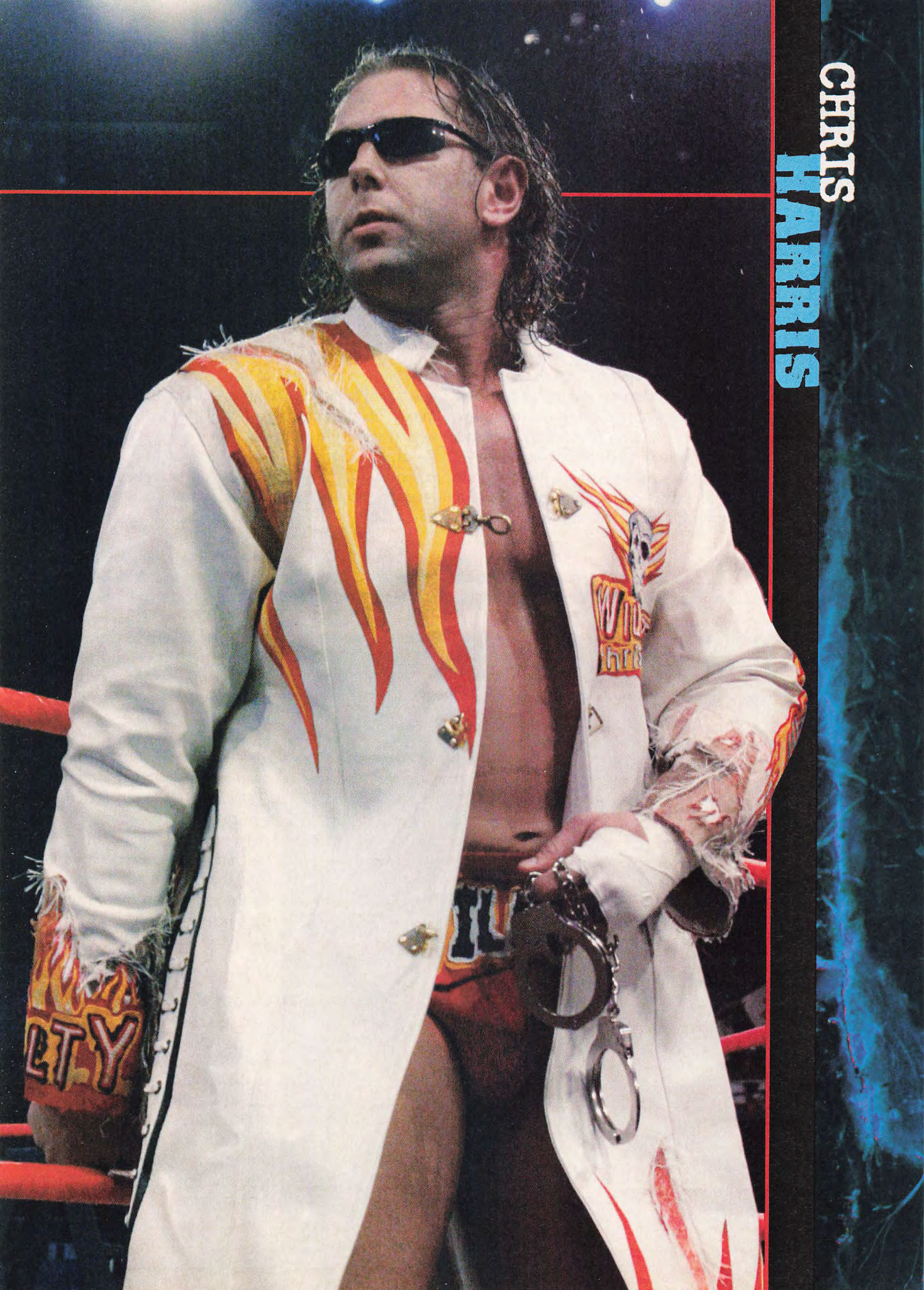
REPERTOIRE: Harris has added about 20 pounds of muscle to his frame since the days he was challenging Jeff Jarrett for the title. Unfortunately, he hasn't added much to his game. If Harris is going to have success against wrestlers such as Kurt Angle, Samoa Joe, and A.J. Styles, he must add more elements to his repertoire. He is particularly susceptible when grounded by an opponent with superior mat wrestling skills. **GRADE: B-**

CAREER GROWTH: Harris has always thrived in the role of underdog. As part of America's Most Wanted, he often rallied fans to his side by absorbing a superhuman amount of punishment before making the heroic tag to the rejuvenated Storm. But Harris isn't a fresh-faced rookie anymore. He's not likely to be as lightly regarded as he was the last time he flirted with the main event. Harris' future success depends on how smoothly he makes the transition from unheralded hopeful to title threat. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: The landscape in TNA has dramatically changed since Harris last set out as a singles competitor. The competition is more intense than it ever has been. There was a time when some members of TNA management looked at Harris as being a potential franchise player in the organization. Harris' stock has dropped since 2004, but his ability hasn't changed. He is due for a breakthrough, be it an incredible match (his Lockdown bout against Storm came close) or a prominent role in a major storyline. Until that moment occurs, Harris has limited value to TNA. **GRADE: C**



CHRIS
HARRIS



VINCE McMAHON

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: When we first made the list of the 50 competitors we would evaluate with report cards this year, Vince McMahon was the reigning ECW champion and relishing his title belt. Then, on the June 11 edition of Raw, McMahon's limo was blown up and Vince was "presumed dead" according to WWE, whatever that was supposed to mean. Vince certainly had a tumultuous year. He lost his hair to Donald Trump at 'Mania, but he had to take some solace in the fact WrestleMania was the highest-grossing pay-per-view event in wrestling history. And he rebounded in grand form by capturing the second major title of his career—not bad for a 62-year-old businessman. But when it came to Mr. McMahon's main goals, humiliating DX and Trump and regaining his title, Mr. McMahon failed. **GRADE: B-**

MARKETABILITY: The *McMahon* DVD wasn't exactly one of the biggest-selling DVDs in recent years,

but how many people not named Hart, Von Erich, or Guerrero could have their family spotlighted on a DVD tribute? Nevertheless, there aren't any Mr. McMahon T-shirts, and that's probably because they wouldn't sell very well. **GRADE: C**

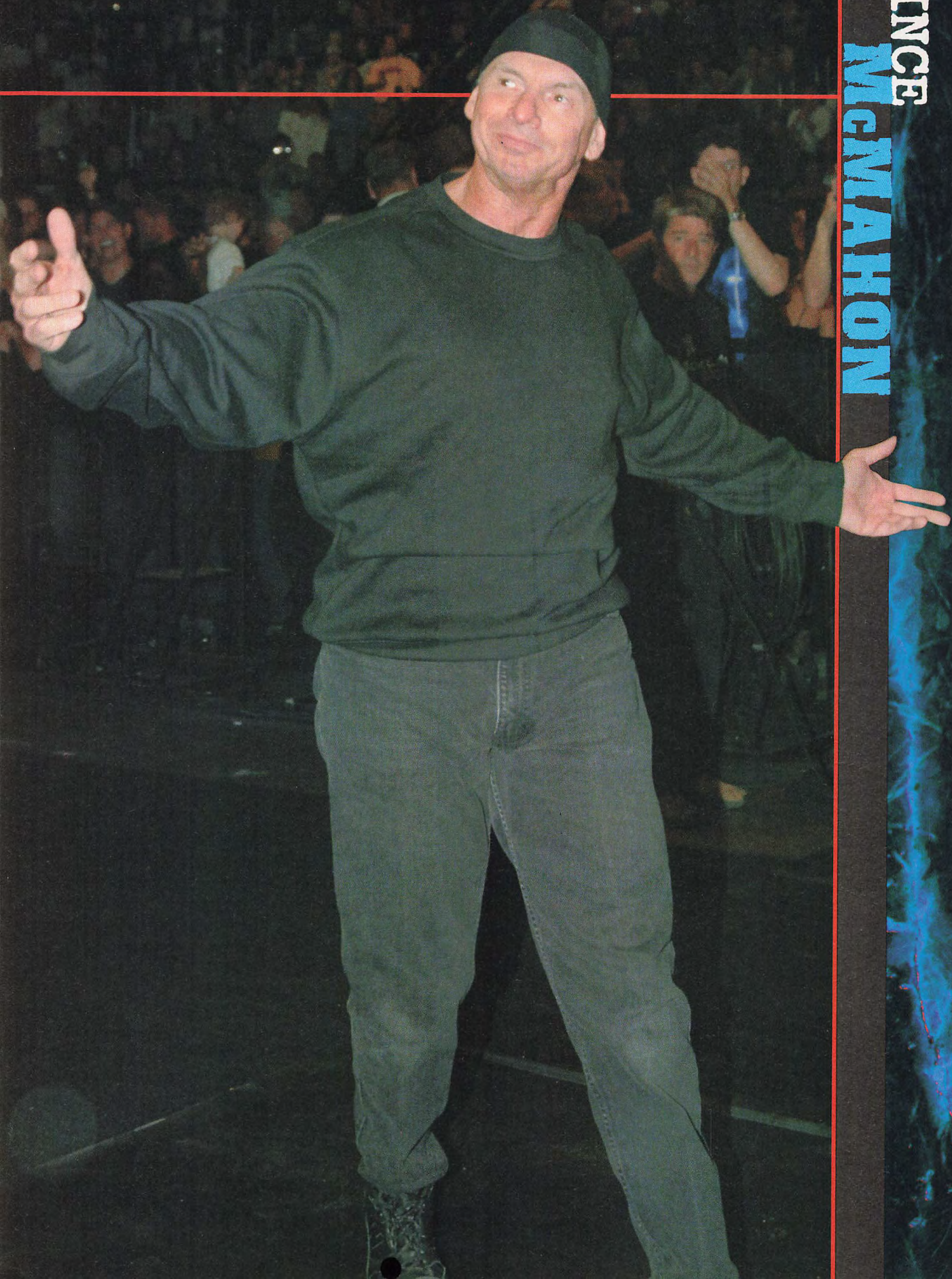
REPERTOIRE: As far as business acumen goes, McMahon is in a class of his own. When it comes to the fine art of cutting a promo or building excitement for a match, no one comes close to Vinnie Mac. But for a guy who grew up at ringside, Vince's wrestling skills are simply atrocious. He has trouble with anything more complex than a headlock. Of course, with all the hired thugs he usually has at his disposal, it didn't really matter. **GRADE: F**

CAREER GROWTH: Before the horrific Benoit family tragedy, Vince's "demise" was the talk of the industry. Had the Mr. McMahon character been killed off, once and for all, to join Al Wilson in WWE heaven for all-time? Did Vince manage to escape via some sort of Ultimate Warrior-esque trap door in the floor of the limousine? Maybe the past 20 years was just the dream of an autistic child *a la* the final episode of *St. Elsewhere*. It's impossible to tell where Mr. McMahon's career will go next. In light of the Benoit situation, maybe it's best that the on-air Mr. McMahon character go on hiatus for an extended period. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

OVERALL VALUE: As the swaggering Mr. McMahon, Vince was the greatest bad guy in WWE history. As the man who took the World Wrestling Federation national and coined the term "sports entertainment," Vince McMahon built pro wrestling to what it is today. Forget "Hulkamania" ... McMahon is the most powerful force ever in the wrestling universe. **GRADE: C**



VINCE
McMAHON



A.J. STYLES

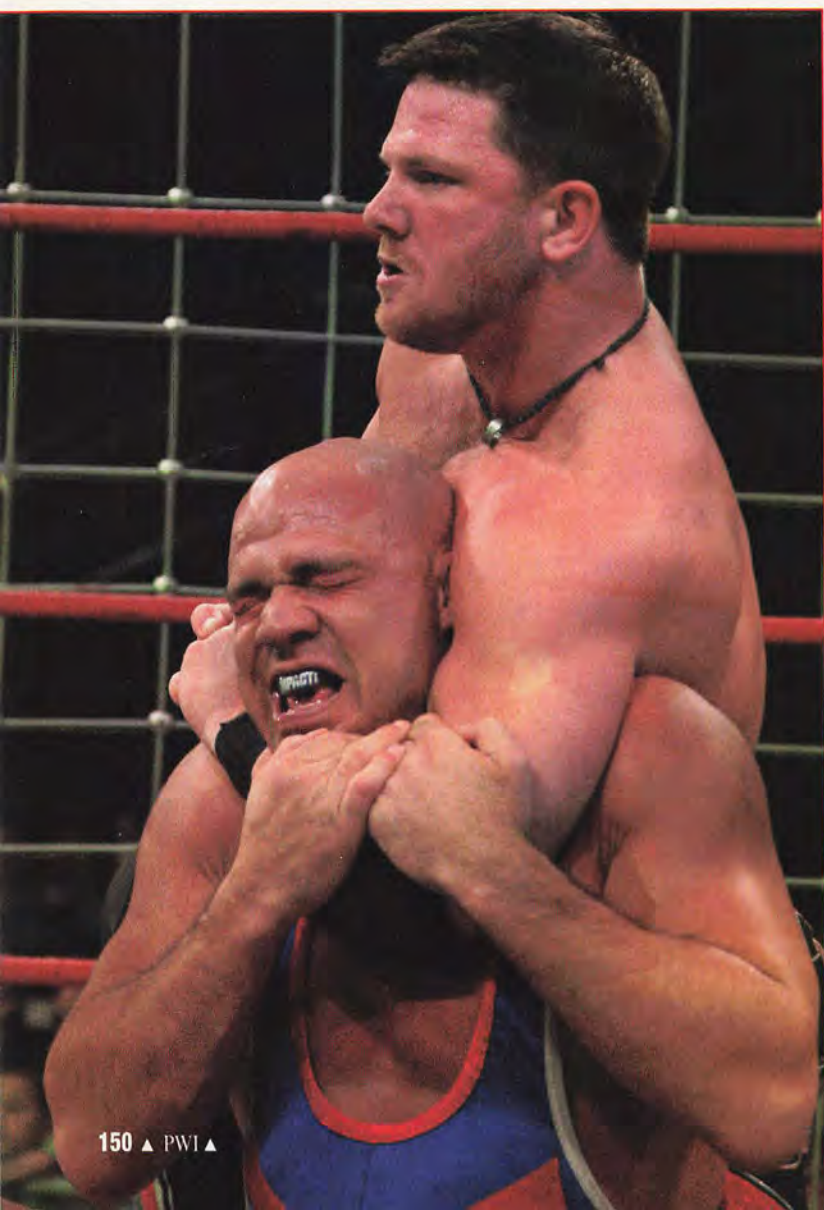
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We can't pinpoint exactly when it happened, but sometime during the past six months A.J. Styles went from being a universally respected three-time former NWA champion to being a comedic stooge for Christian Cage. Last year, Styles and Christopher Daniels were voted Tag Team of the Year by *PWI* readers. We knew that team was destined to be short-lived because both men had singles title aspirations, and both wanted nothing more than winning the NWA World championship. So how did Styles allow himself to become Christian's goofy sidekick? He's further removed from the World title picture than at any point since TNA's inception five years ago. **GRADE: D+**

MARKETABILITY: Prior to the signings of Sting, Samoa Joe, and Kurt Angle, Styles was by far TNA's most bankable commodity. He was the public face of the X division—even when he didn't hold that title—and was promoted as the perfect embodiment of how TNA differed from WWE. Styles represented the next generation of superstars, and his image was used to move DVDs, promote PPVs, and sell T-shirts. Since then, Styles has slipped into the second tier, behind Angle, Joe, Sting, and Cage. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: The key to Styles' success can be summed up with a simple equation: mass x acceleration = force. Styles is always looking for new ways to throw his body higher into the air in order to achieve maximum velocity to create greater force. Styles excels at the aerial game, and he may be the best pound-for-pound high-flyer in the world today. But, as the saying goes, what comes up must come down. When Styles misses those high-risk moves, he absorbs a tremendous impact. Not only does a missed aerial move increase his chances of losing a match, but also the cumulative effect could be devastating. Styles has scaled back on the flying in favor of brawling as of late, but he would be well-served to add some more mat wrestling to his game and play things a bit safer. He's not 21 anymore. **GRADE: B+**

CAREER GROWTH: Styles has taken a big backward step this year. He may be having fun playing the fool alongside Cage and Tomko, but he's hurting his chances of being taken seriously by matchmakers. Jim Cornette was right-on when he said Styles was acting like an idiot recently. Styles is too good to content himself with goofing off as he slips further down the ladder of contention. **GRADE: D+**

OVERALL VALUE: When he's at the top of his game, Styles can be one of the most valuable wrestlers in the sport. A focused Styles could deliver Match of the Year caliber bouts against Angle, Joe, Sting, or even Abyss or Rhino. But wrestling is littered with undersized guys who care more about coming off as hip and funny than living up to their potential. It would be a damn shame if Styles became one of them. **GRADE: C**



A.J.
STYLES



ROB VAN DAM

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: If there's such a thing as a career-suicide hotline, Rob Van Dam should dial that number right away, because he's taken self-destruction to a whole new level. In 2006, Rob Van Dam came out of One Night Stand as the biggest star in any WWE brand. He was the savior of the new ECW, the man who beat John Cena for the Raw World title and was Paul Heyman's pick as the first champion of the WWE-owned ECW. But Van Dam went from the penthouse to the doghouse the moment he was busted for marijuana possession, a clear violation of the WWE Wellness Policy. Everyone is entitled to a mistake, but Van Dam wasn't the least bit apologetic for his behavior. He pub-

licly flouted company policy, forcing WWE's hand to make an example of him. His lack of discipline ruined the biggest push of his career. **GRADE: F**

MARKETABILITY: It's a testament to RVD's natural charisma and showmanship that he maintained such a vocal fan base after several years of under-achieving in WWE. There's a lot of money to be made with Van Dam as a main-event competitor, in terms of ticket sales, PPV buys, and merchandise. Even so, WWE officials seem to think he's not worth the headaches he causes as the company has yet to resign him since his contract expired. He could still be a draw in TNA or Japan, but every day that Van Dam is inactive hurts his market value. **GRADE: B**

REPERTOIRE: Even though Van Dam has been a major star for the past 10 years, opponents still have trouble adjusting to his offense. He relies largely on timing. He bobs and weaves to create openings for high kicks and strikes. He alternates between moving slowly and quickly, ruining his opponents' sense of timing and balance. Even with such a high-risk offense, he rarely mistimes a frog splash or rolling thunder senton. He has the comfort and timing that comes only with experience, and the kickboxing and martial arts skills to dominate. His counter-wrestling remains soft, however, and an opponent who can keep him grounded holds the advantage over him. Fortunately for him, few adversaries are good enough to keep him grounded for long. **GRADE: B+**

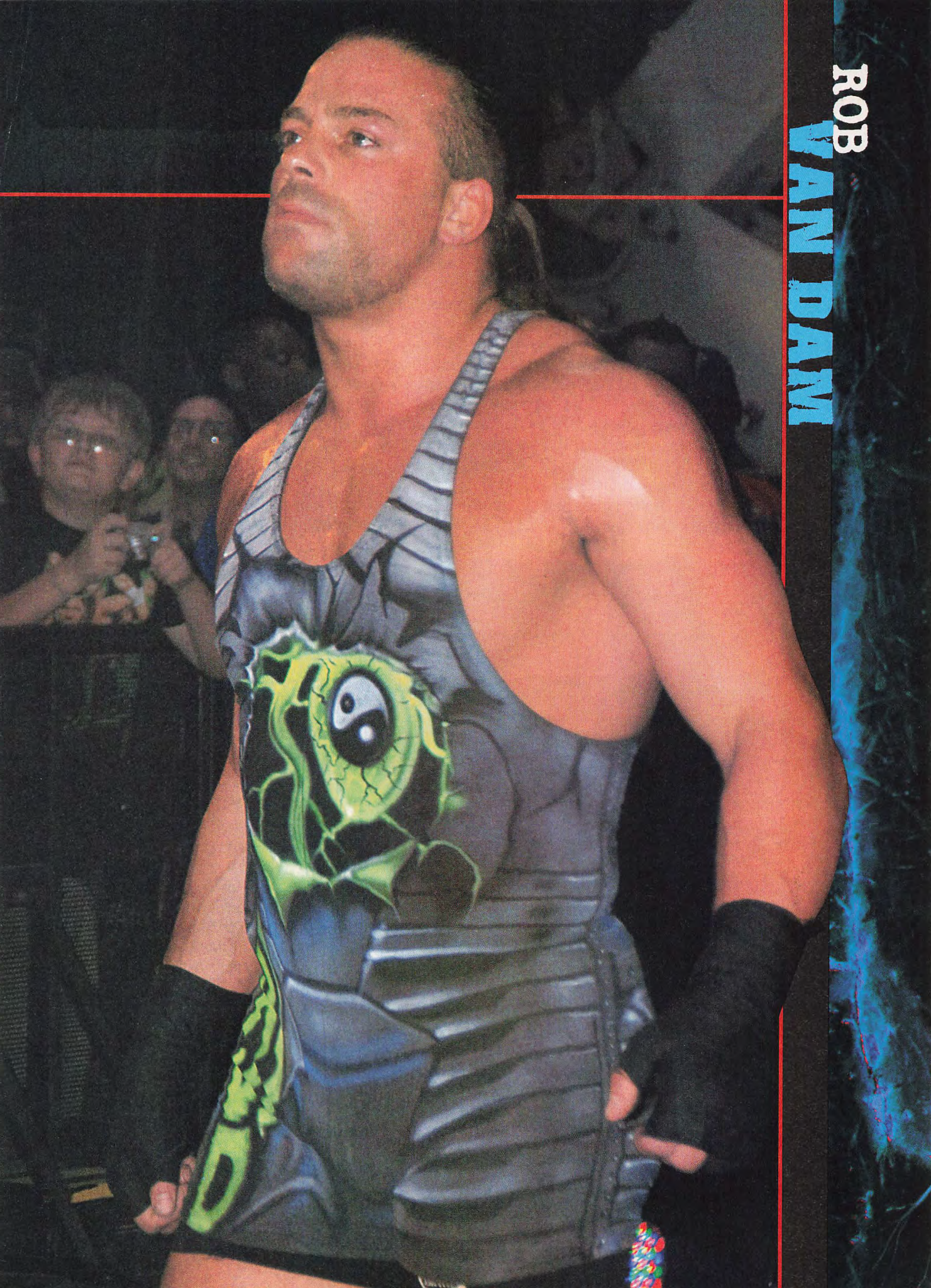
CAREER GROWTH: It would seem as if RVD should earn an "F" in this category for the same reasons listed above. However, there is a chance he can turn all of this into a positive and land either in TNA or Japan. With a renewed sense of dedication, he *might* regain what it now appears he's thrown away. **GRADE: INCOMPLETE**

OVERALL VALUE: Van Dam gives promoters headaches. He can draw dollars, but he's not afraid to speak his mind and ignore company policy. Even worse, sometimes he seems to be giving less than 100 percent in the ring, tending to appear lazy or unmotivated. His benefits outweigh his negatives, but not nearly as much as they once did. **GRADE: C**



ROB

VAN DAM



JACKIE MOORE

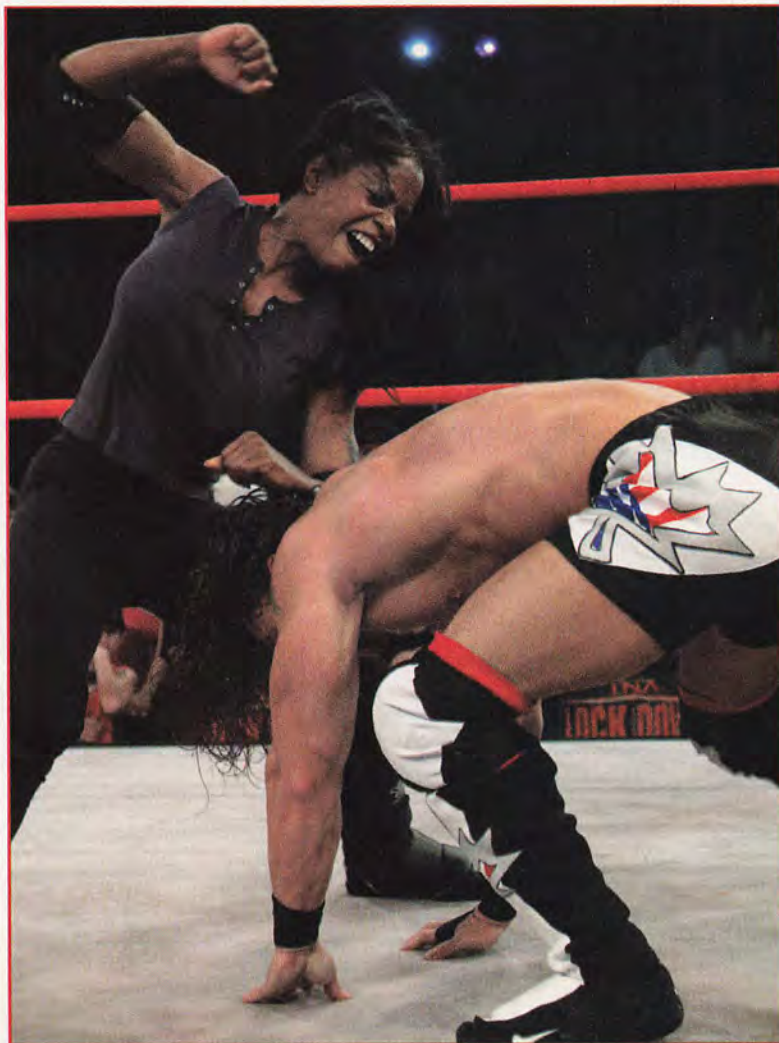
GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: We've got to admit it. Until Jackie Moore showed up in TNA, we had forgotten how much we missed her. Moore had been away from the spotlight since leaving WWE a few years back after a lengthy run with that company. TNA was the last place we expected Jackie to show up since the company hasn't instituted a formal women's division. Jackie may have a stunning body, but she's always been a wrestler first and foremost, and her goal has always been to collect title belts. But when Jackie showed up as James Storm's valet, she created the kind of buzz that has people calling for more women in TNA. Not only did she revitalize her career, but she and Gail Kim also have been showing TNA fans that the ladies can do more than just stand at ringside looking pretty. **GRADE: C**

MARKETABILITY: Jackie is a tremendous wrestler, but without a women's title to target, she doesn't have much marketing potential. While attractive, she's not as photogenic as TNA's resident Knockouts such as So Cal Val, Leticia Kline, and Christy Hemme. Interviews are not her forte. She could opt to compete for the X division title since she has plenty of experience wrestling men (just ask Disco Inferno), but her winning that title would result in such a vehement fan backlash that it could actually hurt her marketability. She's in a tough spot. **GRADE: D**

REPERTOIRE: Jackie got her start in Memphis, and her style has always been that sort of straight forward, smash-mouth Memphis brawling style. She can exchange holds when pressed, but Jackie is also a brawler with one of the best forearm shots you'll find from anyone with a pair of X chromosomes. She's a darn good fighter, but she also tires herself out very quickly. She should really add some wear-down holds to the mix to give herself an opportunity for a breather. **GRADE: B-**

CAREER GROWTH: What did Jackie hope to accomplish by signing with TNA? Was it to earn some quick paychecks and start a new career as a manager? Or does she still consider herself to be an active wrestler and title contender? If she wants to be a manager, Jackie needs to put more emphasis on helping Storm's career advance and work on her interviews. If it's to win more title belts ... then, frankly, she's wasting her time in TNA. **GRADE: D+**

OVERALL VALUE: If TNA were to create a women's division, Jackie would be an invaluable resource. But right now, Jackie is a bit player. If Storm dumps her, there's a good chance TNA might not even want her around. Jackie is most valuable in the ring instead of outside it, but her moments in the ring (not counting interfering) are few and far between. **GRADE: C-**



JACKIE
MOORE



KANE

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: One year ago, Kane earned solid Bs on his *PWI* Report Card. He was just coming off his starring turn in *See No Evil* and a successful Raw World tag team title run with The Big Show. "His star is on the rise," we noted, suggesting he could have success as a character actor outside of the ring, and we thought he could channel his renewed aggression into a world title push inside the ring. Neither happened. In fact, following his forgettable battle with his doppelganger last summer, Kane has been in a tailspin. The Great Khali humiliated him at WrestleMania, and Kane has yet to truly recover. The "Big Red Machine" has done exactly what we warned him not to do on last year's report card: "It would be a shame if all that publicity and renewed killer instinct went to waste and didn't at least get him a title shot." It hasn't, and it is. **GRADE: D**

MARKETABILITY: We still think Kane has some marketing potential. *See No Evil* turned a tidy profit, and there's always the possibility of a sequel. And a Kane autobiography could make for a compelling read, especially if he told a little more about his thoughts on the infamous Katie Vick storyline and the storyline regarding his childhood, being raised by Paul Bearer. But, that being said, Kane has grown stale. He is in desperate need of a new spark—a new manager, a new outfit, some updated moves. He's actually become boring. **GRADE: C**

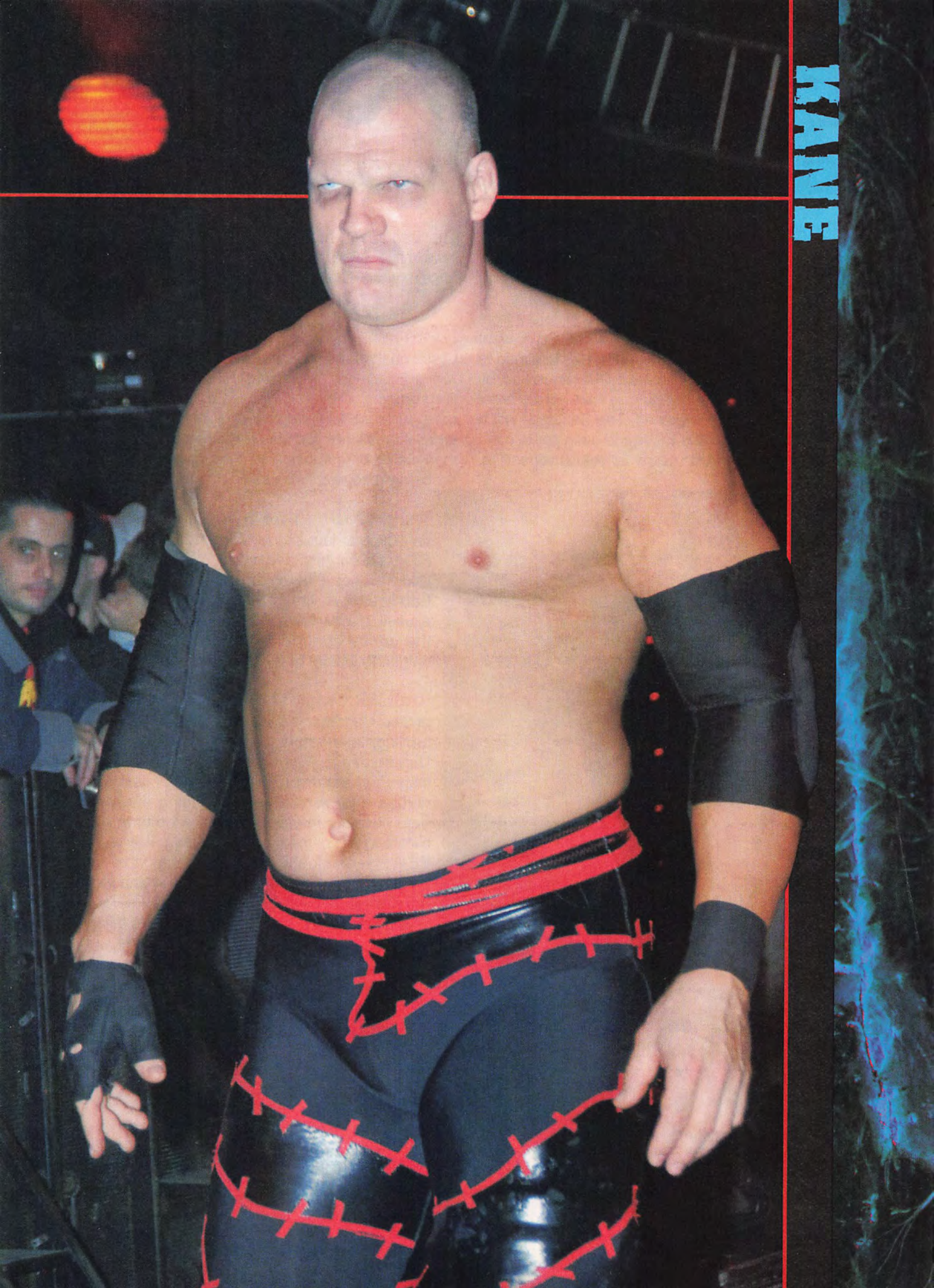
REPERTOIRE: Remember back in 1998 when Kane was beating opponents with his tombstone piledriver, chokeslam, and clothesline off the top rope? Well, those are pretty much still his only moves ... and he doesn't use the piledriver too often anymore. He should consider how The Undertaker has constantly evolved his repertoire, most recently adding MMA holds to his game. **GRADE: C-**

CAREER GROWTH: Kane has grown stagnant, and that's disappointing. With the release of his major motion picture last year, Kane had an opportunity to stand up and finally—once and for all—get out of The Undertaker's shadow. Kane is still haunted by the fact that he held the WWF World title for just one day way back in 1998, and he has yet to recapture it. That was almost 10 years ago, and, right now, Kane seems as far from world title contention as he's ever been. He's going nowhere fast. **GRADE: D**

OVERALL VALUE: Last year, we said this about Kane: "When he's at his most bloodthirsty ... Kane is one of WWE's top heels ... When motivated, Kane is a top star. Otherwise, he's a floater." That still holds true today. Unfortunately, Kane has not seemed motivated at all this year. Hey, May 19 came and went without a whimper from Kane this year! Kane didn't float this past year; he sunk. **GRADE: D+**



KANE



THE SANDMAN

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: The Sandman was never cut out for WWE competition. Sandman made his name for his long, drawn-out entrances, his chain-smoking, and his ability to cane the living tar out of people. He became a star in ECW because he was different from everyone else in WWE and WCW. When ECW went under in 2001, it looked as if Sandman was destined to close out his career living on his ECW reputation by working indy dates in the Philadelphia/New Jersey area. Instead, improbable as it seemed, The Sandman got a new lease on life in WWE's ECW and even got to compete at WrestleMania. After nearly 20 years in wrestling,

The Sandman finally made it to the Promised Land. He's not a WWE main-eventer, but he finally doesn't have to worry about whether his paychecks will bounce.

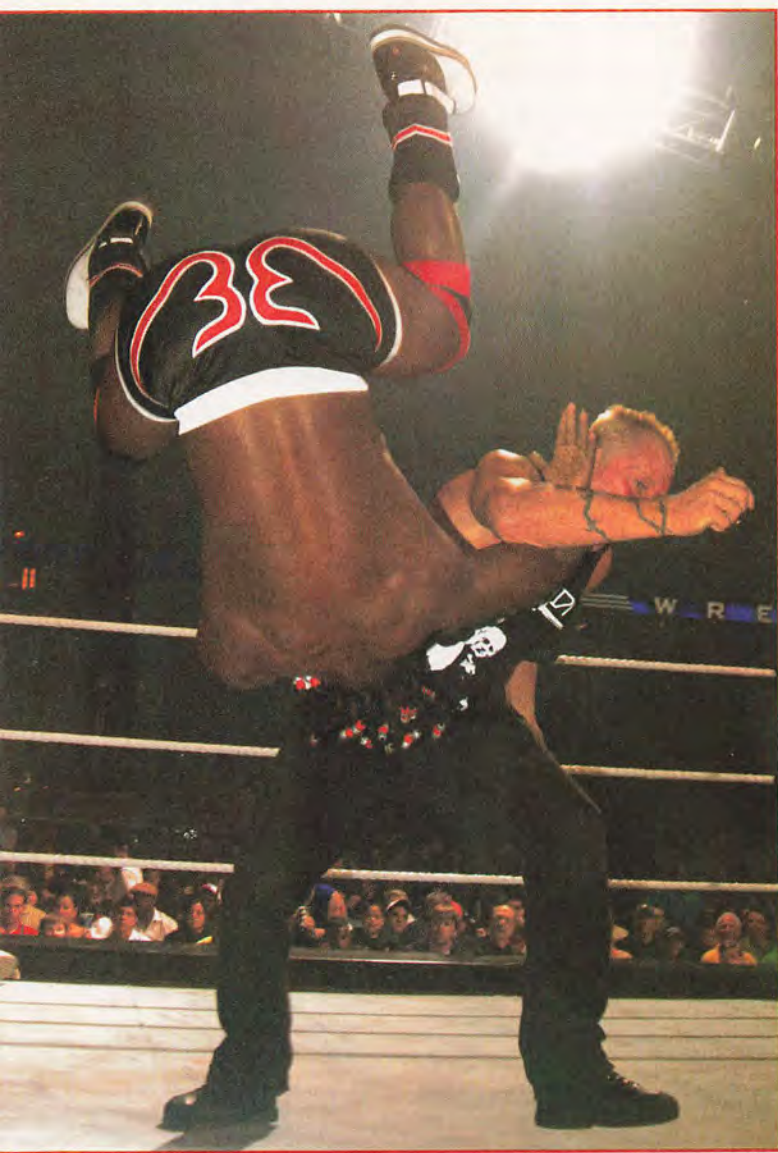
GRADE: B+

MARKETABILITY: Sandman's cult following was based on three main factors: his entrances to Metallica's "Enter Sandman," his chain-smoking, and his profanity-filled promos. The WWE version of Sandman is a sanitized, watered-down version of a one-of-a-kind character. Sandman has lost the very edge that made him a marketable commodity. Even his former diehard fans barely recognize him now. **GRADE: D**

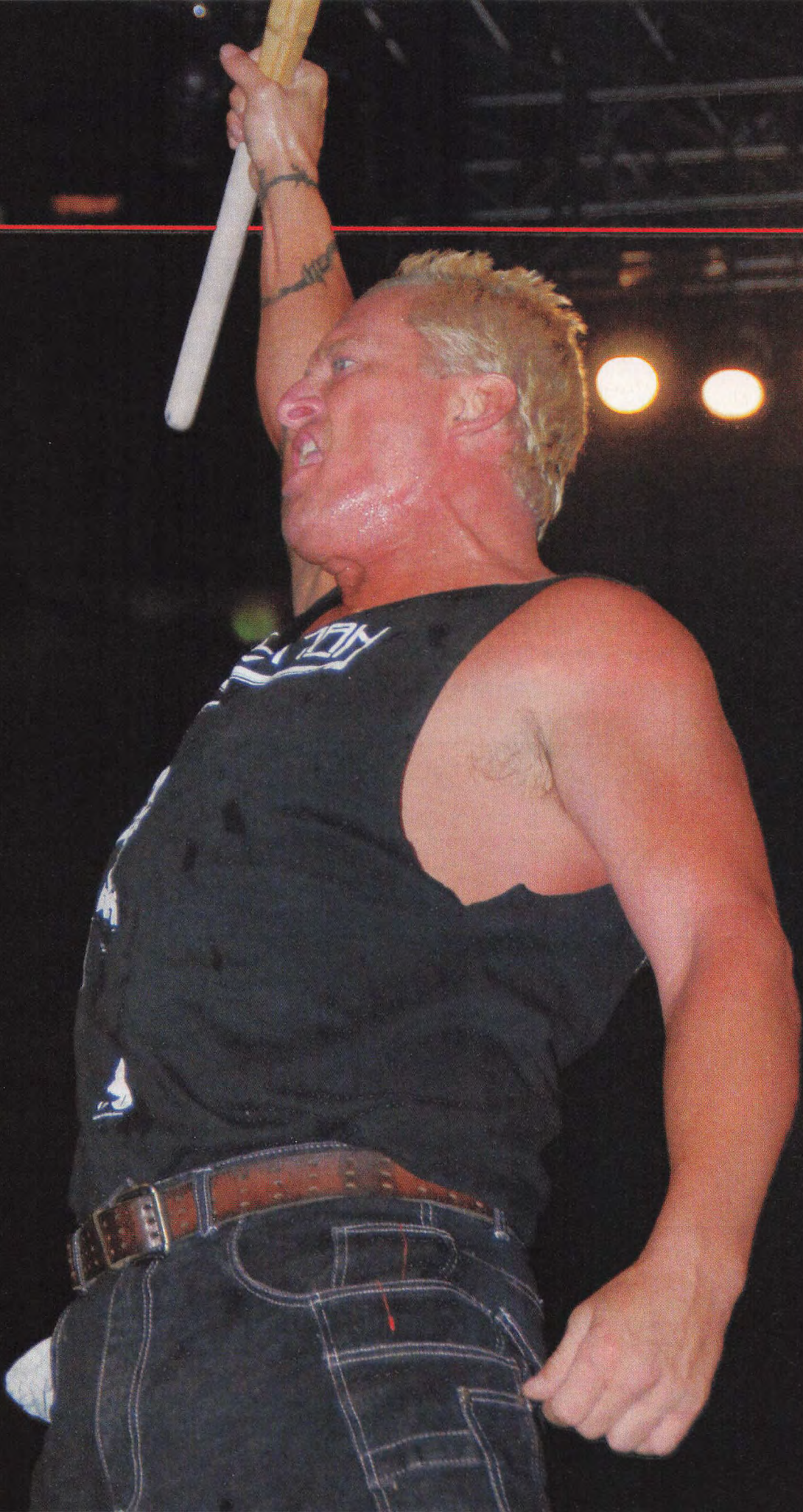
REPERTOIRE: Even in his prime, Sandman used only three or four signature moves. The Sandman of 2007 makes the Sandman of 1997 look like Verne Gagne. Take away his Singapore cane and Sandman has virtually no offense. Frankly, we're expecting a train wreck now that Sandman is out of the comfy confines of ECW and treading the unfriendly waters of Raw. **GRADE: F**

CAREER GROWTH: Steve Austin borrowed a lot of The Sandman's personality to create his beer-swilling, take-no-prisoners "Rattlesnake" persona. Unfortunately, Austin's success on such a grand stage hurt Sandman, who just didn't seem quite so unique after Austin began cussing and drinking beer. Sandman was stuck in a holding pattern before WWE came calling with the newly launched ECW. He competed in the first match of ECW's premiere on the Sci Fi Channel and was a valuable member of the ECW Originals, which is a vast step up from the indy circuit. But his stock has fallen dramatically in recent months. Unless he turns it around soon, he'll be back on the indy circuit soon enough. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: As an ECW Original, Sandman was one of just a handful of links back to that promotion's past. Having Sandman on board gave the re-launched ECW brand a shred of credibility. But it didn't take long before it was apparent that Sandman was no longer the hell-raising title threat he was back in the old ECW. Being sent from ECW to Raw lowers his stock even further. Again, unless Sandman turns it around soon, his days in WWE could be limited. **GRADE: D+**



THE SANDMAN



MARK HENRY

GOAL ACHIEVEMENT: Believe it or not, Mark Henry has been with WWE for 11 years now. Back in 1996, he signed one of the richest deals in wrestling history—a 10-year, \$10-million contract. But Henry has spent the overwhelming majority of that time down in OVW or rehabbing injury after injury. In July 2006, just as he was *finally* emerging as a legitimate world title contender, he tore his patella tendon on *Saturday Night's Main Event*. Eleven years in the sport and not a single title to his credit (not counting the European title Jeff Jarrett handed him way back in 1999). We like Henry, but his goal achievement has been downright pitiful. **GRADE: F**

MARKETABILITY: Henry actually has a somewhat legitimate claim to his moniker, the "World's Strongest Man." As a former Olympic powerlifter, Henry

has credibility. In 2001, he won Arnold Schwarzenegger's "World's Strongest Man" competition. Had the WWE marketing department sent Henry to the talk-show circuit with Schwarzenegger, maybe Henry could have become one of the company's top stars. That never happened. WWE—and Henry—missed a great opportunity because, today, as a grunting, bear-hugging lout, Henry's marketability quotient is nil. **GRADE: D**

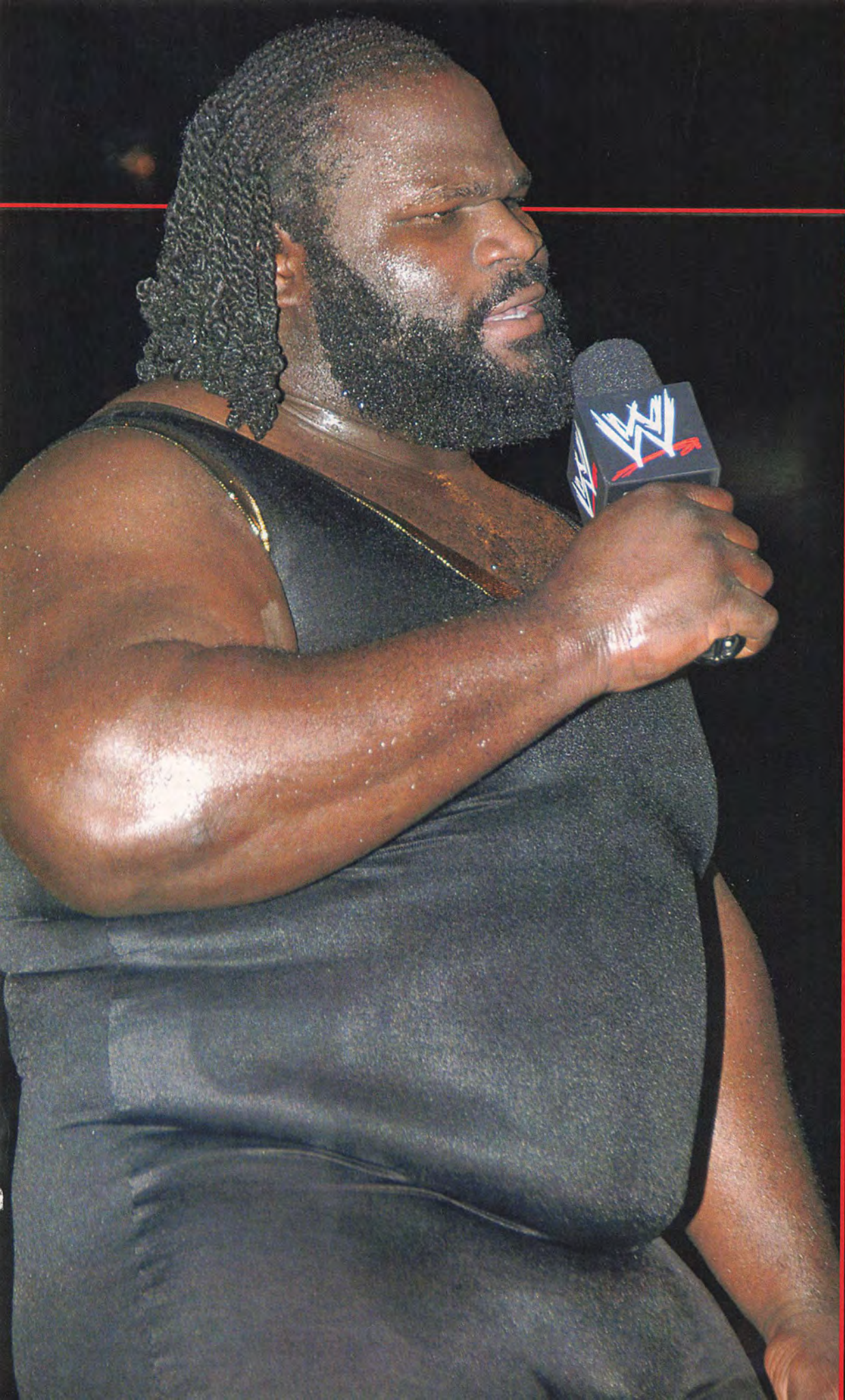
REPERTOIRE: In 11 years, we still haven't seen anything from Henry other than bodyslams, bearhugs, and big splashes. Didn't they teach him *anything* in OVW? **GRADE: D**

CAREER GROWTH: Now that Henry has recovered from his most recent injury, he's once again mowing down the competition and trying to position himself for another main-event run. He wants the Smackdown World title very badly. Such a single-minded approach can be beneficial, but it can also lead to even more frustration when he suffers the inevitable losses along the way. Henry is in dire need of a manager. If he's ever going to make the most of this latest opportunity and do something to repair his legacy as the costliest disappointment in WWE history (well, except for the XFL), he's going to need to win the World title. He's already in the title mix, but a manager could be the difference between another aborted run and that coveted title belt. **GRADE: C**

OVERALL VALUE: If Henry were handed a pink slip from WWE tomorrow, not many fans would care. But if Henry were to debut in TNA, or anywhere else, he'd have an immediate impact. There is no one else in wrestling who has the raw power Henry does. If a wrestler can beat Henry, that competitor is ready for World title contention; beating Henry can transform an up-and-comer into a star. Wrestlers like that are more valuable than you may think. At this point, WWE should use Henry to elevate future stars. **GRADE: D**



MARK
HENRY



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